

**THE CENTERING SELF:
A Model of Self in Relationship for
Feminist Pastoral Counseling**

**A Professional Project
Presented to
the Faculty of the
School of Theology at Claremont**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry**

**by
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May 1992**

This professional project, completed by

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*has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty
of the School of Theology at Claremont in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of*

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

The Centering Self:

A Model of Self in Relationship for Feminist Pastoral Counseling

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This research project develops a model of self in relationship to guide the practice of pastoral counseling from a feminist perspective committed to the well-being of women and the transformation of oppressive social structures. It weaves feminist theologies of erotic power and psychological models of relational selves into a model of a centering self in mutual relation.

Starting from feminist liberation theology's critique of traditional theological perspectives, whose patriarchal images of God and ethics of self-sacrifice have been damaging to women's selves, it explores the vision of self in relationship that emerges within feminist theologies of erotic power. The radically relational theologies of Carter Heyward and Rita Brock suggest a model of sensual embodied selves who find their power and moral agency through mutual connection.

From the feminist psychological discussion on the male and female selves produced by the relational structures of patriarchy, the project clarifies the need for a relational

model of the self which both affirms the strong, creative agency of individual selves and sees this agency as emerging within a relational context. Models of relational selfhood developed by Catherine Keller and feminist psychologists at the Stone Center, Wellesley College, are described and analyzed as a possible psychological grounding for a feminist theology of erotic power. Attention is paid to the ways selves and relationships are fragmented by abusive relationships of control and coercion and to the possibility of healing through relationships of empathic mutuality.

Integrating the theological and psychological discussion, a model of a centering self is proposed wherein center acts as an image of the integrity and agency of a self within a relational framework. The structure, development and spirituality of such a centering self is explored through themes of agency, empowerment, integrity, embodiment, inner space, boundaries, mutuality and difference. The implications of theologies of erotic power and psychologies of relational selves for the ministry of pastoral counseling are described. Applications of the model of a centering self are illustrated through: the development of a feminist therapeutic for pastoral counseling; a proposal for diagnosis; an exploration of the treatment process; and a workshop design.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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I also wish to express my thanks to the many people who have accompanied me on the journey that this project represents.

Jim Stumbo--colleague and supervisor--for believing in me, challenging my self-doubts and living a commitment to a relational theology.

Christa McNerney for the clarity of her relational vision and her intellectual insight into the ways we wound and heal each other.

Linda Filippi for spiritual companionship, loving friendship and mutual seeking.

My teachers, friends and fellow students at the School of Theology at Claremont for intellectual stimulation and affirmation.

The Friends of Claremont Friends Meeting for giving me a loving faith community of worship and fellowship.

Mt. Toby Friends Meeting for taking my pastoral counseling ministry under its care and, in particular, the members of my Oversight Committee--Jan Hoffman, Alan Eccleston and Nancy Davies--whose worship, affirmation and discernment have kept me open to the spiritual context of my life and work.

My partner, Jean Semrau, who grounds my life in steadfast care, shared laughter and tears, and unfailing companionship, and who takes me back to the simple goodness of life and relationship lived from the heart.

And, finally, the friends and clients over the years who have shared their stories, joys and struggles and have made real for me the words written here.

Thank you all and blessed be.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

This project addresses the problem of defining a model of self and relationship for the theory and practice of feminist pastoral counseling which is faithful to the vision of human being embedded within feminist theologies of liberation.

Within recent years the impact of feminist thought within both psychology and theology has led to a flowering of creative ideas and innovative understandings. As these new theoretical developments are applied to an understanding of ministry in general, and pastoral counseling in particular, new models of pastoral practice are emerging. This project is part of that endeavor. Foundational to both psychology and theology are basic understandings of the nature of human persons. This project will articulate and develop a model of human selves in relationship which can guide the practice of pastoral counseling from a feminist perspective.

The project arises out of my own search for a theoretical model, faithful to my theological beliefs and spiritual practice, which can ground my work as a pastoral counselor. It is one attempt to clarify and articulate a

feminist approach to pastoral counseling--one which arises from my experiences and struggles within a particular social and historical context in dialogue with feminist thought and the faith community. I enter this ongoing dialogue in hopes that, as people of faith, we may enhance our understanding of human woundedness and wholeness and move towards the co-creation of human communities which honor ourselves and our capacity for mutual caring, which honor our relation to all of life, and which honor the vibrant mystery that grounds our being.

Central to the task of pastoral counseling is the belief that engaging individuals therapeutically within the context of faith can bring healing, wholeness and empowerment. Definitions of healing and wholeness, as well as our understanding of the therapeutic process, depend on the understanding of self and relationship which we bring to the process. Recent feminist psychologists have challenged some of our traditional thinking about the nature of selfhood and of relationship, while feminist theology provides us with new models for thinking about the self-God relationship and our relationship with one another as people of God. I believe that both these sources point toward an integrative vision of human being which can inspire our work as pastoral counselors.

Pastoral counseling primarily attempts to address the relational woundedness of our lives. It requires a model of

self and relationship which helps us to understand both the contours and the causes of such woundedness, and the healing process which can enable creativity and intimacy to emerge and be sustained in human relationships. In the process of healing, in the creation of human relationships of love and justice, we come to know the liberating power of God. In the deepest sense, then, this project addresses the ongoing praxis of the church as it lives the ethical challenge of learning what it is to love one another--as people of God, as participants in the body of the living Christ, and as members of the earth community.

Thesis

My thesis is that the model of a centering self in mutual relation provides a theoretical model which is appropriate to a feminist theological understanding of human being and which provides a useful framework for pastoral practice from a feminist perspective. This model of a centering self, which develops as a center of awareness and creativity within empathic relationship, illumines both our understanding of human brokenness and the process of healing.

All life is understood to be inherently interrelated. The term "relationship" refers to the mutual interaction between parts of the interrelated web of life including human beings, other living creatures and the earth. Relationship is the primary unit of life within which

different elements have their being. "Self" is the experience of identity, continuity and relationality to others that provides a sense of coherence to human experience of the world and our place within it.

Previous Research

In developing the model of a centering self, this project analyzes the assumptions about the nature of human selves and relationships present within feminist theologies of liberation and considers the adequacy of various psychological theories in defining a model of self and relationships appropriate to the feminist practice of pastoral counseling.

Feminist thinking commits itself to a "preferential option for women"¹--trying to understand the world from and through the lives of women, and grounding itself in the concrete experiences of women living in a world characterized by patriarchal power relations which prevent them from participating with equal value and power in the political and economic process. As women have struggled to claim value and power for themselves, they have discovered the many ways in which patriarchal structures and institutions have attempted to define women's nature, experience and place in ways which encourage the

¹ This is my adaptation of Latin American liberation theologies' "preferential option for the poor" which was expressed at the Medellin Conference in 1968. It reflects an a priori commitment to act and think from the perspective of the oppressed--in this case, women.

perpetuation of patriarchal social and economic relations.

From the start, feminist reflection has involved the knowledge that within patriarchy female selves have largely been defined by men and in opposition to male selves. Simone de Beauvoir's classic analysis argued that women are defined as "Other" in reference to the male Self of patriarchy.² Human beings develop as gendered selves within a system which structures particular identities and forms of relationship. As feminists have critiqued the defining of women's selves and relationships as oppressive to women, they have also struggled to articulate their own experience of selfhood and agency.³ Feminist theological reflection has critiqued the ways in which religion has acted, and does act, to uphold oppressive power relations, while also finding language to speak of women's own spiritual experience and to create a religious vision of equality and just relationship.⁴

² Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, trans. H. M. Pashley (New York: Vintage Books, 1952).

³ For example, Adrienne Rich in Of Woman Born (New York: Norton, 1976) makes a devastating critique of the patriarchal institution of motherhood while also validating women's experience of mothering. Critique and vision form a crucial dialectic in feminist thought. See, for example, Haunani-Kay Trask, Eros and Power: The Promise of Feminist Theory, (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1986).

⁴ The work of Rosemary Radford Ruether is illustrative in this regard. See Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983); and Women-Church: Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985).

Feminist Theology

The outpouring of feminist theology over the last thirty years reflects a rich diversity of thought and experience; however, the majority of feminist critiques and constructive theologies share three key emphases of importance to the understanding of human selves:⁹

1. An emphasis on sensuality and embodiedness, the material and the historical. Feminist theology affirms the sacredness of creation, of the material reality in which we have our being, which includes our own embodiedness and sensuality.

2. An emphasis on relationality as ontologically and theologically basic. Feminist theology sees our existence as human beings as inherently interdependent and mutually co-creative. Our lives emerge within, and are structured by, the biological, social, and cultural network of relations within which we exist.

3. An emphasis on creative power, personal and communal action. Feminist theologians emphasize the power and agency of women in shaping their own lives and worlds.

Feminist theologies are liberation theologies committed

⁹ This three-fold analysis of feminist values can be found in Beverly Harrison Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics, ed. Carol S. Robb (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 3-21. Embodiment and relationality as central feminist themes are the focus of a feminist anthology edited by Paula M. Cooley, Sharon A. Farmer and Mary Ellen Ross, Embodied Love: Sensuality and Relationship as Feminist Values (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987).

to social transformation and to the belief that the love of God is known in communities which struggle to embody relationships of mutuality, caring and justice. From such a feminist perspective, sin is a social as well as an individual reality manifest in abusive relationships of cruelty, exploitation and injustice. Redemptive power is found in celebration of the sacred gift of life in communities of mutual vulnerability where we act to resist injustice in solidarity with one another.

The three key themes--embodiedness, relationality and creative power known in community--embody a vision of human beings as selves in relationship which pervades feminist theology. Very little has been written, however, which explicitly attempts to specify the nature of human selves and relationship this vision implies. This project will articulate the vision of human being embedded in feminist theologies of liberation, and clarify its implications for psychotherapeutic practice, so that it is more directly accessible for the practice of pastoral counseling. Rather than attempting to survey the whole field of feminist theology, it will concentrate on the work of Carter Heyward, Beverly Wildung Harrison, Catherine Keller and Rita Nakashima Brock, who have developed a theology of erotic power which conveys a powerful image of female selving in relationship.

Within feminist theology several specific issues have

arisen which are particularly relevant to the topic of selfhood in relation to women. In 1960, Valerie Saiving published an article suggesting that traditional doctrines of sin and love had been developed from a male standpoint and were inappropriate for the female experience. She argued that female temptations lie in the area of negating the self rather than in self-assertion.⁶ This was the start of a critique of the Christian ideal of self-sacrifice which many feminist theologians have explored since. Judith Plaskow argued that for women sinfulness is not about selfishness or pride.⁷ Women's sin is the refusal to be a self rather than the selfish assertion of self over and against others and God. Susan Dunfee further developed this argument to name women's sin as the sin of hiding.⁸ In Dunfee's thinking, a theology which sees self-assertion as sinful and self-sacrifice as virtuous perpetuates a patriarchal system which gives women little power and expects them to take care of others. When women accept such

⁶ Valerie Saiving, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View" in Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion, eds. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979).

⁷ Judith Plaskow, Sex, Sin and Grace: Women's Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1980).

⁸ Susan Dunfee, "The Sin of Hiding: A Feminist Critique of Reinhold Niebuhr's Account of the Sin of Pride," Soundings (Fall 1982): 316-27. See also Beyond Servanthood: Christianity and the Liberation of Women (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1989).

a theology they are prevented from asserting their own creativity and power without guilt, shame or criticism. A feminist commitment sees as essential the need for women to claim their own selves and their power to act creatively to shape their personal and communal worlds.

Beverly Harrison has developed a vision of Christian loving alternative to that of self-sacrificial love, calling us to the embodied, active, mutual power with which we nurture each other in human relationships.⁹ Susan Dunfee's later work critiqued traditional models of Christian living and ministry based on the model of servanthood.¹⁰ Dunfee argued that the ministry of women must be based on freedom and authority rather than on a servanthood which reinforces the disempowering stereotypes of patriarchy. These themes of active, powerful selfhood and mutual relationship continue to emerge as feminist theologians define a relationality which differs from the hierarchical, "power-over" model of relationship upheld by patriarchy.¹¹

Since feminist theory is committed to connecting the personal and the political, feminist theologians have also critiqued the individualism of much traditional theology in favor of a communal understanding of human selves and of

⁹ Harrison, Making The Connections, 3-21.

¹⁰ Dunfee, Beyond Servanthood.

¹¹ For example, see Linell E. Cady, "Relational Love: A Feminist Christian Vision" in Embodied Love, eds. Cooley, Farmer and Ross.

redemptive power. As selves we are formed by our social and cultural context, and yet we are moral agents who can learn, with one another, to use our power to love to create communities of love and justice. The idea of an autonomous soul, engaged in a private transaction with God, able to perform works of charity or service toward another, is replaced by a vision of human community, where everyday acts of mutual connection and caring can embody and reveal the love of God moving among us, calling us to the co-creation of a redemptive community of peace and justice. These themes are well developed by Carter Heyward, Dorothee Soelle and Beverly Harrison.¹² In the context of the black church, Archie Smith also argues for the necessity of a relational self for a liberation praxis and shows how a relational self connects both social ethics and therapy as processes of social transformation.¹³

Another important issue is that of the relationship between self and God. Much traditional theology has stressed the radical separation between self and God, human

¹² See Carter Heyward, The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relation (Washington, D.C.: Univ. Press of America, 1982), and Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God (New York: Harper and Row, 1989); Dorothee Soelle and Shirley A. Cloyes, To Work and to Love (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), and Soelle, The Window of Vulnerability: A Political Spirituality (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); and Harrison, Making the Connections.

¹³ Archie Smith, Jr., The Relational Self: Ethics and Therapy from a Black Church Perspective (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982).

and divine. Feminist theology rejects such a dualism for more immanent, dynamic and relational images of God. Sallie McFague, for example, advocates new metaphors for the God-self relationship such as Friend and Lover.¹⁴ Dorothee Soelle also argues for the use of metaphors which move away from the transcendental and hierarchical models of God the tradition reinforces.¹⁵ Carter Heyward names God as our "power-in-relation" becoming known among and between us, in our encounters with one another and with the creation of which we are a part.¹⁶ For feminist theologians, God is immanent and incarnate; everyday life and relationships are sacramental and revelatory; and transcendence lies in the vastness and mystery of God's presence rather than in God's separation from human selves and the material world.

Feminist spirituality, therefore, rejects self-denial and asserts that the path to God is not through rejecting self but rather through finding one's deepest self. Such a path takes one fully into the material, sensual world rather than separating oneself from it. Thus, within feminist theology, human selves are body-selves, and they are sensing-feeling-selves as well as thinking selves. Our spirituality is known in and through our bodies, not in

¹⁴ Sallie McFague, Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).

¹⁵ Soelle and Cloyes, To Work and to Love.

¹⁶ Heyward, Redemption of God.

opposition to, or divorced from, our sensuality.

Feminist Psychology

Many of the issues about the nature of the self that arise in feminist theologies are also reflected in the psychological literature. Here questions of differing views of self and relationship, as they relate to the position and self-understanding of women, are more clearly addressed. Feminist psychologists have pointed out that the human self has been traditionally defined as a male self while women's understanding of selfhood and relationship is seen as inferior or less mature. Thus, in the classic Broverman study, psychologists' descriptions of male selves matched their description of mature, healthy selves, while their description of female selves matched their description of immature or unhealthy selves.¹⁷ The mature, healthy self is, from this perspective, the autonomous ego--self-sufficient, with clear boundaries, able to act to get his needs met in the world. Such a self is defined in opposition to others, and competition and self-gratification are primary modes of relating. Working within this framework, traditional psychological models of self-development have stressed separation from symbiotic ties and the emergence of the autonomous ego.

¹⁷ I. Broverman, D. Broverman et al., "Sex-Role Stereotypes and Clinical Judgments of Mental Health," Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology 34 (1970): 1-7.

Jean Baker Miller's Towards a New Psychology of Women, first published in 1976, provides an important reference point for feminist thinking about women's psychology.¹⁸ Miller looks at the psychological characteristics that women develop growing up and living within a patriarchal society --namely, emotional connectedness, nurturing, cooperation and participation in other's development. Growing up with these characteristics, women's identity and self-esteem are often built around their capacity to nurture and sustain relationship. Women's psychological characteristics are devalued in patriarchal society where autonomy, personal achievement and competitive engagement are valued goals. Women's selves, developed around different tasks and goals, have therefore been devalued and seen as less mature than men's selves.

Carol Gilligan's influential work also suggests that women define their selves and their identity predominantly in terms of their relationships with others, while men are more likely to define themselves and their identities through their activities, often over and against others.¹⁹ Nancy Chodorow argued from an object relations perspective, that this difference is related to gender-specific patterns

¹⁸ Jean Baker Miller, Toward a New Psychology of Women (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976).

¹⁹ Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982).

of child-rearing in our culture where girls develop their identity in connection with their mothers and boys develop their identity in opposition to their mothers.²⁰ Chodorow uses this argument to show how unequal gender relations are reproduced in successive generations and thus perpetuate patriarchal structures from one generation to the next. Chodorow argues that women develop a relational self-structure which prepares them well for their expected role as relational caretakers and emotional nurturers while discouraging them from traditionally male roles which require achievement, competition and self-reliance.

Feminist psychologists have been aware of the limits and liabilities that such a relational selfhood brings to women. Psychologically, defining ourselves in terms of relationship can lead to an overwhelming sense of responsibility for others and a debilitating sense of guilt when we cannot live up to this. We can easily become enmeshed in relationships, living through and for others, losing touch with our own needs and feelings and letting ourselves be abused. Much of the recent work, by Ann Wilson Schaef, Melody Beattie and many others, on addictive relationships and co-dependence attempts to analyze these problems and encourage women to break out of such

²⁰ Nancy Chodorow, The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1978).

destructive ways of relating to themselves and others.²¹ It takes great effort as a woman in our society to develop a strong and secure sense of oneself as an individual with the ability to act creatively and powerfully to structure one's world. The feminist movement has, therefore, emphasized the importance of finding our own selves, knowing and expressing what we think and feel, and acting to take charge of our lives and relationships.

At the same time, however, feminists have been reluctant to jettison a relational identity in favor of following the male route to individuated and separative selfhood. In fact, much feminist critique rests on outlining the devastating effects caused by such a separative and autonomous view of human selves which sets us in opposition to one another and to the earth. Writers such as Susan Griffin and Carolyn Merchant and, from a theological perspective, Rosemary Ruether and Carol Christ, have written eloquently of the connections between male alienation with its denial of relationship and feeling, and the violence that destroys our relationships with each other

²¹ See Anne Wilson Schaef, Co-Dependence: Misunderstood, Mistreated (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986); and Escape from Intimacy: The Pseudo Relationship Addictions (New York: Harper and Row, 1989). See also Melody Beattie, Codependent No More (New York: Harper, Hazelden, 1987); and Beyond Codependence (New York: Harper, Hazelden, 1989).

and with the planet.²² Recognizing the relational and interdependent nature of our existence is of prime importance to the feminist vision. Moreover, it is through connections to others in supportive groups that women have experienced "hearing each other into speech,"²³ found healing from some of the personal woundedness engendered by patriarchy, and discovered the creative power of communal work for social change. Thus it is precisely through their connections with one another that women have discovered their own voices and a greater sense of their own power and agency.

A feminist self must, therefore, affirm the interrelatedness of life and acknowledge her own interdependence within a network of relationship at the same time that she affirms her own uniqueness, power and agency. Feminist psychologists have, therefore, begun to search for a model of relational selfhood which will support women in developing a strong sense of self without succumbing to an

²² Susan Griffin, Women and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her (New York: Harper, Colophon, 1978); and Pornography and Silence: Culture's Revenge Against Nature (New York: Harper and Row, 1981). Carolyn Merchant, The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980). Carol Christ, "Reverence for Life: The Need for a Sense of Finitude," in Embodied Love, eds. Cooley, Farmer and Ross, 51-64. Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Motherearth and the Megamachine: A Theology of Liberation in a Feminine, Somatic and Ecological Perspective," in Womanspirit Rising, eds. Christ and Plaskow.

²³ Nelle Morton's words are now part of feminist language. See The Journey is Home (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985).

autonomous selfhood which separates and sets persons in opposition to one another. This also requires an understanding of power as emergent within relationship rather than as something the autonomous self exerts over others.

Gilligan suggests that women move towards a stronger sense of self and maturity as moral agents through widening their circle of caring to include themselves as well as others and by beginning to take responsibility for choices which may lead to hurt. In this way the female self affirms her own selfhood and agency while at the same time keeping her basic commitment to relationship. Ann Wilson Schaef and other writers on co-dependency and addictive relationship emphasize women's need to develop clear boundaries which allow for an intimacy where we can be present with ourselves as well as others, taking responsibility for relationship while participating fully in our own lives.

Other authors have argued more directly for a view in which self and relationship are not seen as oppositional but rather depend crucially upon each other. For example, feminist psychologists at the Stone Center in Wellesley, Massachusetts, who include Jean Baker Miller, Judith Jordan, Alexandra Kaplan, Irene Stiver and Janet Surrey, argue that there is no such thing as a self separate from relationship; that we are always selves-in-relation with other selves; that it is only within connectedness with others that we can

come to a recognition of our own uniqueness.²⁴ In the view of the Stone Center psychologists, persons develop by coming more fully into their relational power rather than through learning to be separate selves. The development of a mature self, characterized by relational competence, has fluid ego boundaries and can maintain integrity in relationship. Such selfing depends on the experience of mutually empathic and empowering relationships.

Catherine Keller, bridging philosophy, theology and psychology, develops a comprehensive model of a self-in-rerelationship in her brilliant analysis of sexism, separation and the patriarchal self, From a Broken Web.²⁵ She names such a self a "connective self" and contrasts this to the complementary selves of patriarchy--namely, the separative (mostly male) selves and the soluble (mostly female) selves which together sustain patriarchal structures. Keller argues against a separate, autonomous self for either men or women on the grounds that such a self is implicitly misogynous. She argues that it is not women's definition of themselves in terms of relationship that is the problem;

²⁴ The research from the Stone Center is available as a series of working papers, Works in Progress (Wellesley: The Stone Center, Wellesley College, 1982-91). Some of the major papers in the series have recently been published together. See Judith V. Jordan, Alexandra G. Kaplan, Jean Baker Miller, Irene P. Stiver and Janet L. Surrey, Women's Growth in Connection: Writings From the Stone Center (New York: Guilford, 1991).

²⁵ Catherine Keller, From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism and Self (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986).

rather, it is their bondage to particular types of connection which are exploitative of women's selves. She sees these types of relationships, characterized by hierarchical power dynamics of dominance and submission, which are supported by the separative ego of patriarchy. Thus the separative self, and its complementary partner the soluble self, perpetuate the understanding and practice of power as control and dominance. Keller's analysis illustrates well why questions about the models of self and relationship which ground our theories are central to the feminist task.

Keller relates her work to that of other feminist philosophers and psychologists who are questioning our understanding of human selfing even more radically. French feminist thought, as seen in the work of Luce Irigaray, for example, argues against the idea of a fixed personality and sees women as having many selves.²⁶ Many social psychologists would also argue for the fluidity of any concept of self and affirm its changing and multiple construction reflective of our social and historical location. Such a self is relational in the widest sense, constituted from the social, historical and political

²⁶ Luce Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977).

situation in which we live.²⁷

Research Questions

Several questions emerge out of this dialogue which inform the current project. What are the characteristics of a strong, mature self in relationship and how is this formed? What are the dynamics which damage or inhibit the development of such a self? What are the role of boundaries to a coherent self? How is our sense of our bodies related to our sense of self? What kinds of relationships foster mature selving and, conversely, what kinds of selves foster mature relating? What current psychological theories might provide adequate models of the self for a pastoral psychotherapy informed by feminist theology?

It is noteworthy that several feminist theologians, whose work will be used in this project, make reference to various psychological theories in developing their theological arguments. For example, Rita Brock draws upon object relations theory to develop her christology of erotic power, and Catherine Keller also draws heavily on object

²⁷ The idea of a relational and multiple self has a long history in psychology, notably in the work of William James and George Herbert Mead. See William James, The Principles of Psychology (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1890), 230-40; and George Herbert Mead, Mind Self and Society, ed. Charles W. Morris (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934).

relations theory.²⁸ For these authors the work of Alice Miller, in particular, is important in understanding the human brokenness that arises in the context of abusive relationality.²⁹ Carter Heyward finds affinity with self-in-relation psychology which, she says, has helped her clarify the emotional and pastoral implications of her theology of mutual relation.³⁰ More directly, Margaret Huff has briefly outlined the connections between self-in-relation psychology and feminist theology in her description of an interdependent self.³¹ Other writers, notably Demaris Wehr, make use of Jungian theory as a basis for pastoral theology from a feminist perspective.³² Building on this previous work, the current project goes beyond making these connections between psychological and theological thinking, to outline a definite model of self and relationship which has enough psychological and theological depth to be used as

²⁸ See Rita Nakashima Brock, Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power (New York: Crossroad, 1988); and Keller, From a Broken Web.

²⁹ See Alice Miller, The Drama of the Gifted Child (New York: Basic Books, 1981); and Thou Shalt Not Be Aware: Society's Betrayal of the Child (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1984), among others.

³⁰ Heyward, Touching Our Strength.

³¹ Margaret C. Huff, "The Interdependent Self: An Integrated Concept from Feminist Theology and Feminist Psychology," Philosophy and Theology 2, no. 2 (1987): 160-72.

³² Demaris Wehr, Jung and Feminism: Liberating Archetypes (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987).

a basis for therapeutic practice.

Feminist Pastoral Counseling

Within the field of pastoral counseling, several recent research projects have attempted to develop an understanding of pastoral counseling from a feminist perspective. Phyllis Roe looks at the problems women face as they seek an authentic sense of female selfhood in today's society of changing gender roles and expectations.³³ Using self psychology, hermeneutics, and a theology of the Spirit, she explores the process of therapy with women who are struggling to achieve a clearer, more empowering sense of self. Christa McNerney develops a feminist theological understanding of human brokenness and reconciliation and applies this to incest.³⁴ Taking feminist theology's understanding of sin as the use of power over another, she uses self-in-relation psychology as a way of understanding the fragmentation of human selves and relationship caused by abusive power relations. She then describes the therapeutic process necessary for healing and reconciliation. Linda Filippi develops a pastoral counseling praxis responsive to ecological concerns using ecofeminism and Gestalt therapy to

³³ Phyllis Carol Roe, "Therapy as Creative Process: Psychological, Hermeneutical, and Theological Perspectives on the Formation of Authentic Female Selfhood" (S.T.D. Diss., Emory University, 1988).

³⁴ Leona Marie Christa McNerney, The Power to Maim, the Power to Heal: Sin and Reconciliation in Relational Transformation, Ph.D. Diss., School of Theology at Claremont, 1991 (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1991).

broaden the feminist theological vision to include an understanding of our selves in relation to the earth.³⁵

Gail Unterberger offers the most detailed theoretical approach to pastoral counseling which integrates feminist psychology and feminist theology.³⁶ Seeing the theme that connects feminist psychology and theology as a pragmatic concern for the well-being of women, Unterberger looks at women's psychological and spiritual journeys as they move from an identity defined by patriarchal structures, through an identification with male power, toward a woman-identified or self-identified perspective where women carve out their own identity and agency. Unterberger sees this journey as a journey towards consciousness and empowerment. She uses object relations theory and feminist family therapy as tools for understanding how women can change internalized and external relationships towards a fuller experience of their own identity and agency. Unterberger sees feminist pastoral counseling as having the potential to keep feminist spiritual values and theological commitments at the foreground of therapeutic interaction and believes that feminist pastoral counselors can offer particular expertise

³⁵ Linda Fillippi, Of Sweet Grapes, Wheat Berries and Simple Meeting: Feminist Theology, Gestalt Therapy, Pastoral Counseling, and The Earth. Ph.D. Diss., School of Theology at Claremont, 1990 (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1990).

³⁶ Gail Lynn Unterberger, Through the Lens of Feminist Psychology and Feminist Theology: A Theoretical Model for Pastoral Counseling, Ph.D. Diss., School of Theology at Claremont, 1990 (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1990).

in understanding how changing God-images accompany women's journey toward well-being.

Underlying the work of these feminist pastoral counselors are particular understandings of self and relationship. This project attempts to make explicit a model of self and relationship which can be used by pastoral counselors working from a feminist perspective.

Scope and Limitations

The precise intent of this project is to explore an understanding of self that is consistent with and required by a feminist liberation theology; to critically examine several psychological theories of selfhood for their adequacy in this regard; to propose a model of self in relationship which is adequate theoretically, relevant to the practice of a feminist spirituality, and applicable to the therapeutic practice of pastoral counseling; to develop the implications of such a model for the practice of pastoral counseling; and to show how such a model might be used practically in shaping diagnosis and treatment and in designing a workshop for women. The model of self in relationship developed in this project will discuss the structure of selves in relationship, their psychological development, how such selves become damaged and distorted, and the process of healing selves in relationship.

This project will not attempt to survey the whole field of feminist theology but will restrict its investigation to

feminist theologies of liberation which share an understanding of erotic power. This will include the work of Carter Heyward, Rita Nakashima Brock, and Beverly Harrison. The project will not be concerned with the philosophical complexities surrounding the nature of self and relationship. It will assume a common-sense understanding of these terms and follow the usage common to most psychological literature. It will draw only selectively upon psychological theory. The task of this project is primarily practical and its interest is in developing a working model, and an understanding, of self and relationship which can form a basis for therapeutic practice.

This project is limited to the social and cultural context within which it emerges. It is primarily based upon the experience of white, middle-class women in the context of the struggle for justice in the midst of the fragmented and violent world of the late twentieth century. Its model of self in relationship thus speaks directly to white, middle-class women's experience of self and relationship. Other writers from different perspectives must evaluate and adapt its relevance to their context. This project is further limited in that the primary focus is on relationships between and among human beings rather than relationships with other living creatures and the earth.

Procedure

This project attempts to integrate a theology and a psychology of self in relationship in the form of a practical approach to pastoral counseling. It starts by explicitly articulating the nature of self and relationship assumed by a feminist theology of liberation and, in dialogue with the discussion of human selves within feminist psychology, it draws upon aspects of psychological theory to develop a model for pastoral counseling. The model itself weaves a psychology and a spirituality of human selves and relationship which can form the basis for the practice of feminist spirituality as well as the practice of pastoral counseling.

This is a theoretical rather than an empirical project. Its task is primarily constructive. It uses and analyzes existing theological and psychological theory in its constructive endeavor and the method is one of literary research. In addition the questions this project addresses and the theory it develops are born from my own experience as a woman of faith and my clinical experience as a pastoral counselor.

Overview

Chapter 2 starts with the commitment of feminist liberation theologies to the well-being of women and the transformation of hierarchical social structures, and it asks the question of whether the Christian tradition can be

empowering for women's selves. It explores the feminist theological critique, which shows how patriarchal images of God and an ethics of self-sacrifice undermine women's creative agency and self-expression, and describes a theology of erotic power which provides an empowering theological vision for women. Chapter 2 goes on to explore the vision of human beings as selves in relationship that feminist theology affirms and requires, and outlines the implications of a radically relational theology for the nature of selves and relationships. It describes how, for theologies of erotic power, the sacred is known in the deepest stirrings of life and love within ourselves and is manifest in life-giving relationships which nurture and sustain human community. The chapter then looks at how our current social life is characterized by alienation and the repression of erotic power where sin is manifest in abusive relationality. Finally, it explores how selves are broken, healed and reconciled in relationship with one another.

Chapter 3 examines the feminist psychological discussion of male and female selves and their relation to patriarchal social structures. Describing the difficulties of models of separate autonomous selves from a feminist perspective, it clarifies the need for a relational model of selfhood where strong creative selves emerge within a relational framework. Chapter 3 then explores object relations theory, Keller's model of the connective self and

the self-in-relation theory developed by Stone Center psychologists, as possible models of relational selfhood. It describes how these theories understand the fragmentation of selves and relationships that occurs within abusive relationships. Finally, it points to the communal task of structuring our social relationships with one another in empowering and liberating ways and to the crucial role of a mutually empathic relational context in the development of healthy selves.

Chapter 4 outlines a model of a centering self in mutual relation which integrates the preceding psychological and theological discussion. It describes the structure, development and spirituality of a centering self around themes of center, moral agency, integrity, embodiment, inner space, boundaries, mutuality and difference. It also considers how relational violation and disconnection fragment selves and relationships and looks at how these can be healed.

Chapter 5 looks at the implications of theologies of erotic power and psychologies of relational selves for the ministry of pastoral counseling and illustrates the application of the model of a centering self to the practice of pastoral counseling. It outlines a feminist therapeutic for pastoral counseling which describes the therapeutic relationship, a possible diagnostic framework, and the treatment process suggested by the model of a centering

self. It concludes with a description of a workshop for centering selves.

CHAPTER 2

Theologies of Erotic Power

To work as a pastoral counselor in our late twentieth century world is to work in the context of a world in crisis. Violence and inequality pervade the entire fabric of our common life from our families and most intimate relationships to the relationships between classes, races and nations. To work as a person of faith within such a crisis is to affirm the presence of the healing, transforming power of God within such conditions of sin and suffering and to hold a vision of a kin-dom¹--a world where relationships are characterized by caring and justice. If such a faith is to be more than a temporary consolation, however, it needs to be grounded in a theology and a spirituality which address the specific conditions of our time, and it needs to be experienced in actual occurrences of healing and redemption. Feminist theologies of liberation provide a powerful analysis and a vision of healing and transformation which can be a fruitful ground for the practice of pastoral counseling in our current context of crisis and violence.

¹ The phrase "kin-dom of God" was coined by Elizabeth McAlister to reclaim "Kingdom" from its hierarchical context. See "Faces of Faith," The Other Side, May/June 1989, 12-18.

To live in our present world as a woman is to know that one's access to social, economic and political power is limited and to be vulnerable to physical, emotional and economic violence. The extent of one's access to power, and vulnerability to violence, is dependent on one's class and race as well as gender, so that women experience interwoven dynamics of oppression. The feminist movement, arising out of women's struggle for personal freedom and social transformation, acts and thinks with the vision that "every female child in each and every community and culture will be born to share a full horizon of human possibility."² Feminist thinking, therefore, commits itself to a "preferential option for women."³ It listens to the voices of women telling the stories of their lives, supports the emergence of women into freedom and wholeness, and resists all that would diminish and devalue women.

Feminists name patriarchy, with its ideology of misogyny and male supremacy, as the socio-economic structure of relationship which condemns women to subordinate status and justifies their exploitation. Feminist theologians have, therefore, critiqued traditional theological discourse, church doctrine and religious practice for their role in supporting patriarchal relations of power which devalue and oppress women. At the same time they have

² Harrison, Making the Connections, 7.

³ See Chapter 1, note 1.

created theological discourse and spiritual practices which embody a religious vision of equality and celebrate women's lives and spirits.

While all feminist theologies embody a concern for the equality, dignity and value of women, feminist liberation theology, as a subset of feminist theology, makes explicit its connection to other twentieth century theologies of liberation and emphasizes a commitment to the struggle for justice for all oppressed peoples. Feminist liberation theology also continues to root its faith within the Christian tradition. While appreciating the insights and practices of feminists of different faiths; it works in dialogue with the Christian tradition albeit in highly critical and creative ways. With other liberation theologies, feminist theologies of liberation choose to: think and act from the perspective of the oppressed; attend to the particular and concrete situation of those struggling for justice;⁴ embody a praxis of reflection and action which moves between social analysis and political commitment; critically examine theology, doctrine and religious practice for their role in maintaining injustice; and proclaim a liberating gospel of hope and a vision of right relationship in community. Feminist liberation theology is reflected in

⁴ Within a liberation perspective, justice does not refer to an abstract norm but to "a praxis that . . . literally creates a common good." Harrison, Making the Connections, 39.

the writings of Rosemary Radford Ruether, Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Dorothee Soelle, Sharon Welch, Beverly Harrison, and Carter Heyward, among others.

From a feminist perspective, the structures of patriarchy are characterized by hierarchical relational dynamics of dominance and submission where the power and agency of women and other oppressed groups are suppressed and abused. The maintenance of such power relations depends upon the use of coercive force applied directly as well as through physical, economic and ideological intimidation. Feminists have spent much time unmasking the structures of knowledge which accompany and create oppressive power.⁵ In particular, they have pointed to the prevalence of hierarchical, dualistic concepts in intellectual thought including theology. Dualisms such as mind and matter, self and other, culture and nature, men and women sustain an image of human being as conflictual and oppositional and act in subtle and not-so-subtle ways to reinforce relations of

⁵ As Michel Foucault has analyzed so carefully, the structures of power and knowledge within a society evolve together: what counts as true is reflective of the power structures within which that truth emerges--knowledge serves social and political functions. However, women, as subordinated people, have the possibility of articulating subjugated knowledges outside the dominant episteme and this puts women in a revolutionary position. It is the hope of feminist theologians that by articulating such alternate and subversive knowledge, possibilities for alternate ways of living, where power relations are characterized by inclusiveness and justice, can emerge. See Sharon Welch, Communities of Resistance and Solidarity: A Feminist Theology of Liberation (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1985) for a feminist theological interpretation of Foucault's ideas.

oppressive power.

What does such an analysis imply about human selves under patriarchy? Within a socio-economic system defined by hierarchical power relations, a dualism between self and other relegates subordinate groups to the status of other and so deprives them of selfhood and agency--i.e., the power to create and determine their own lives. Thus, Simone de Beauvoir, often credited as the mother of the current wave of feminism, grounds her critique of patriarchy in the observation that female selves have been defined by and in opposition to male selves; women have been defined as "Other" to the male self of patriarchy. In response, a feminist commitment calls women to establish their own power as selves and creative agents.

For feminist liberation theology, committed to a praxis of liberation, it is essential, therefore, that the selfhood and agency of women be affirmed and empowered. Since liberation theology proceeds from an analysis of social relations, the selfhood and agency that is affirmed, however, is one which is thoroughly contextualized and emerges from the network of social relations within which we live. Thus, "the presuppositions that we live in a relational matrix . . . and that we have a common response/ability to live in mutual relation, provide the impetus for feminist/womanist liberation theology."⁶ This

⁶ Heyward, Touching Our Strength, 16.

entails "a radically relational understanding of justice as rightly ordered relationships of mutuality within the total web of our social relations."⁷ In addition, feminist understanding of selfhood and agency is located in the everyday lives of women struggling "to lay hold of the gift of life, to receive it, to live deeply into it [and] to pass it on."⁸ Connecting the personal and the political, a feminist liberation theology thus affirms the material reality of women's lives and our physical existence including "our bodies, ourselves"--so often the locus of oppression and, potentially, a locus of liberation.

The Feminist Critique

From the perspective of feminist liberation theology with its commitment to the empowerment and agency of women, the Christian tradition seems to act more often as oppressor than liberator. Many feminist theologians have, therefore, wrestled with the question: Can Christianity be empowering for women? Some have answered in the negative and moved toward theologies and spiritualities which are more directly affirming of women's selves and feminist values. Others like Rita Brock find that "Christianity has nurtured as well as wounded me,"⁹ and strive to read scripture and tradition with a feminist hermeneutic which rages at their patriarchal

⁷ Harrison, Making the Connections, 253.

⁸ Harrison, Making the Connections, 8.

⁹ Brock, xv.

embeddedness yet finds ways to weave new tapestries from their broken webs.

Images of God

When considering the question of whether Christianity can be empowering for women it is clear that the Christian tradition has been damaging to women's selves in many ways. First, as Mary Daly so cogently put it: "If God is male, then the male is God."¹⁰ In its assertion of God as father, the image of divine power is removed from women's experience of themselves so that, as Carol Christ argues, women, unlike men, can never have their "full sexual identity affirmed as being in the image and likeness of God." Thus, "female power can never be fully legitimate or wholly beneficial."¹¹ Christ and other feminists argue that female images of deity are essential to women's wholeness. Others argue that it is the idolizing of the father image that is problematic and we need to use multiple images and metaphors of divine power.¹² Recently, Carroll Saussy has shown how women's journeys toward adequate self-esteem often involve the rejection of

¹⁰ Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 19.

¹¹ Carol Christ, "Why Women Need the Goddess: Phenomenological, Psychological and Political Reflections" in The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power Within the Feminist Movement, ed. Charlene Spretnak (Garden City: Anchor Press, 1982), 73.

¹² See McFague, Models of God; and Soelle and Cloyes, To Work and to Love.

patriarchal images of God and movement toward diverse images of divine presence and action including Goddess.¹³

It is not, however, just the fact that God is imaged as male that is problematic; the image of divine lord and ruler legitimates male authority in the world and encourages women's passivity and dependency. The image of the patriarchal family itself pervades Christian imagery and theology. Feminists argue that parent imagery, however benevolent, suggests a relation of dependence and inequality which needs to be supplemented by images of mutuality such as Friend and Lover.¹⁴ Thus it is not just the image itself but what that image suggests about the nature of the divine-human relationship that is important. Christianity also affirms that redemption is given through the male figure of Jesus as Christ. Feminists question whether a male savior can save women and have developed alternative christologies where Christ, as model of redeemed humanity, is not restricted to the male figure of Jesus but can also become Christa whom we may come to know as our sister.

Dorothee Soelle suggests that Christian theology has two strands: the first which images God as wholly other and distant from human being; the other, primarily in the mystical tradition, which emphasizes God's closeness and

¹³ Carroll Saussy, God Images and Self Esteem: Empowering Women in a Patriarchal Society (Louisville: Westminster, John Knox Press, 1991).

¹⁴ McFague, Models of God.

presence with human beings.¹⁵ The former image of a transcendent, powerful, creator God arises from and sustains a dualism between human and divine, matter and spirit. The connections between such dualisms and the position of women, who are seen as closer to nature and thus further from divinity, have been made powerfully by Ruether, Christ and Susan Griffin, authors who also point to the effect of spirit-matter dualisms on our treatment of the earth. Such dualisms encourage an ascetic, body and pleasure-denying spirituality where the path to God requires the denial and rejection of the self. In contrast, feminist theologians such as Soelle argue for a creation-centered, incarnational theology which rejoices and celebrates divine presence in nature, in our bodies and in our co-creative power.

Such a view is expressed in two texts which have become part of the feminist theological canon--namely, Ntozake Shange's passionate affirmation, "I found God in myself and I loved her, I loved her fiercely,"¹⁶ and the voice of Shug in Alice Walker's The Color Purple:

Here's the thing . . . I believe. God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God. But only them that seach for it inside find it. . . . My first step from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds. But

¹⁵ Soelle and Cloyes, To Work and to Love, 43-52.

¹⁶ Ntozake Shange, For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), 67.

one day when I was feeling like a motherless child, which I was, it come to me: that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all. I knew that if I cut a tree my arm would bleed. And I laughed and I cried and I run all around the house.¹⁷

Despite such a bold affirmation of immanence, feminist theology does not reject transcendence but locates that transcendence in the vastness and power of God's presence in the totality of life, and in its creative potential to birth and transform life in new ways. God is not separated from or above human persons and material life.

The Sacrifice of the Self

Another major source of disempowerment for women within the Christian tradition has been the emphasis on self-assertion as sinful and self-sacrifice as virtue. This sustains a patriarchal structure which gives women little power and expects them to take care of others. Building on work by Valerie Saiving and Judith Plaskow, Susan Dunfee makes an clear analysis of the effects on women of an ethic of self-sacrifice: "Inasmuch as Christian theology identifies pride and self-centeredness as the sin of humanity, it calls women to confess the wrong sin. And . . . discourages women from finding our centers and taking pride in who we can be."¹⁸ Dunfee names women's sin instead as the sin of hiding--"fearing to create a center from which to

¹⁷ Alice Walker, The Color Purple (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 167.

¹⁸ Dunfee, Beyond Servanthood, 19.

name and define herself and the world"¹⁹--a sin encouraged by an ethic which judges self-centeredness to be morally wrong.

Dunfee goes on to argue that altruism and service as models for Christian living are dangerous for women. Conventionally, such concepts rest on an opposition of self and others such that to be responsive to others' needs means to give up one's own. Dunfee suggests an alternative reading of the Christian message which can be empowering for women, arguing that the liberating gospel of Christianity has two movements: the first a call into freedom and authority--a call to selfhood--and the second an affirmation that such selfhood is vulnerable, deeply committed to relationality, and aware of the needs of others. For Dunfee, the Christian community is a community of friends, not servants, called to befriend the world and to use their freedom and authority to act toward the creation of freedom for others. Thus the Christian moral challenge is not to self-sacrifice but to the use of our power and freedom in service of the co-creation of a better world. With Soelle and Jurgen Moltmann, Dunfee argues that God does not offer us an authoritarian relationship requiring "mere obedience," rather God offers us empowerment to become creative agents

¹⁹ Dunfee, Beyond Servanthood, 19.

of our own liberation and that of others.²⁰

Beverly Harrison agrees:

Radical Christian theology should be predicated on the assumption that there is no ontological split between self/other; there is no monolithic polarity of self-interested action versus other-regarding-ness. All people--each of us--in-relation-to-all--have a mandate, rooted in God, to the sort of self-assertion that grounds and confirms our dignity in relationship. Self-assertion is basic to our moral well-being.²¹

Harrison develops an ethics which conveys a vision of Christian loving which does not require self-sacrifice and which defines a relationality different from the patriarchal power-over model of relationship. Thus, Harrison calls us to the embodied, active, mutual power with which we nurture each other and build up human community. Such a perspective moves away from an emphasis on an individualistic understanding of the self-God relationship, to one where the creative, sustaining and redeeming power of God is known in and through human communities of mutuality. Selves are understood as relational, formed by the social, cultural and personal context in which they live, at the same time that they are moral agents called to create with one another communities that nurture justice.

A Theology of Erotic Power

The vision upheld by feminist liberation theology has

²⁰ See Dorothee Soelle, Beyond Mere Obedience (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1982); and Jurgen Moltmann, The Power of the Powerless (London: SCM Press, 1981).

²¹ Harrison, Making the Connections, 240-41.

been most powerfully articulated in the theologies of erotic power developed in the writings of Carter Heyward and Rita Brock. Their theologies use the concept of erotic power as a powerful image which weaves together the central themes of feminist liberation theology, namely, embodiedness, relationality and creative power known in community. A theology of erotic power offers a revolutionary and transformative vision of human being for both liberating theologies and psychologies of human personhood. The remainder of this chapter will describe the anthropology of selves in relationship implied by a feminist liberation theology of erotic power.

The Feminist Eros

The feminist Eros has its origin in the work of feminist writers such as Adrienne Rich, Robin Morgan, Susan Griffin, Cherrie Moraga, Alice Walker and Audre Lorde, and is now being articulated in more detail in feminist theory and philosophy as well as theology.²²

What is the erotic as feminists have come to define it? The erotic refers to the life-force within us which is

²² See, for example, Griffin, Pornography and Silence; Rich, Of Women Born, and Blood, Bread and Poetry (New York: Norton, 1986); Robin Morgan, Lady of the Beasts (New York: Random House, 1976); Cherrie Moraga, Living in the War Years (Boston: South End Press, 1983); Walker, The Color Purple; and Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches (Trumansburg, N.Y.: Crossing Press, 1984). Haunani-Kay Trask analyses the concept of the erotic in the works of these writers and names it the "feminist Eros" in Eros and Power, 92-93.

rooted in our bodies and our feelings and which moves us into life-nurturing and satisfying relationships with each other and with all life. It is an energy and a power which connects us to life and through which we come to know what it is to love and be loved. Here is Carter Heyward's definition:

The erotic is our desire to taste and smell and see and hear and touch one another. It's our yearning to be involved--all "rolled up"--in each other's sounds and glances and bodies and feelings. The erotic is the flow of our senses, the movement of our sensuality, in which we experience our bodies' power and desire to connect with others. The erotic moves transpersonally among us and also draws us more fully into ourselves."²³

And from Audre Lorde:

The erotic--the sensual--those physical, emotional and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us . . . the passions of love in its deepest meanings.²⁴

What does an anthropology built on such an understanding of the erotic look like? It starts by claiming that the central fact about human existence is that we are alive, part of the myriad, abundant life of this planet. And to be alive is to be embodied. Human life is manifest in the physical--we are flesh, blood and bone. Our bodies are amazing, complex organisms which mediate all

²³ Carter Heyward, Touching Our Strength, 187. The concept of God as our power in mutual relation is theologically developed in greater detail in Heyward's earlier book The Redemption of God.

²⁴ Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in Sister Outsider, 56.

feeling, thought and action. We are sensual and sexual. We know what it is to feel delight, pain, hunger, desire, fullness, ecstasy and release. To claim human nature as erotic is, therefore, to claim as central our sensual existence as material, embodied creatures. Rather than seeing our bodies, needs, instincts, feelings and passions as somehow part of our animal or lower nature, it is to claim these as distinctly human and essential to our moral life and well-being.

The erotic also points to the relational character of our existence. It acknowledges our embodiedness and our capacity for feeling and pleasure and places these in the context of relationship. The erotic is about our feelings of attraction and desire for each other; our yearning to reach out, connect and unite with each other; our longing to touch and be touched; our potential for sharing deep feeling with one another. It is also about our power to love and care for each other, to nurture the life in each other, and to engage in mutually-enhancing relationships. Indeed, we are dependent on such loving relationships for our physical and emotional life.

Further, the erotic is about the life-giving power which undergirds our life. It is a creative power. We feel our aliveness as a power--a passion for life, creativity and connection--and in relationship we feel the healing, sustaining, transforming power of the erotic moving

between and among us. It is a power rooted in feeling and in relationship, the power which brings us to life and keeps us going, a power which emerges in mutual relationship, a power-with one another rather than a power-over another. Erotic power is our power to create life-giving relationships in community with one another.

In summary, to say that human being is erotic is to say that humans are embodied, feeling, relational beings with the power to create and nurture mutually satisfying, loving relationships--relationships which are essential to the continuation of our mutual life. The erotic self is a feeling-body-self-in-relation. And erotic power is the fundamental form of our relatedness to self, others and the world.

Another important characteristic of the erotic is that it is a primary source of both knowledge and power. Our bodies and our feelings are fundamental sources of knowledge. As Harrison says:

All our knowledge, including our moral knowledge, is body-mediated knowledge. All knowledge is rooted in our sensuality. We know and value the world, if we know and value it, through our ability to touch, to hear, to see. Perception is foundational to conception. Ideas are dependent on our sensuality. Feeling is the basic bodily ingredient that mediates our connectedness to the world. When we cannot feel, literally, we lose our connection to the world.²⁵

The knowledge that our strongest feelings give us tells us

²⁵ Harrison, Making the Connections, 13.

about the nature of the world and our position in it.²⁶ As well as giving this awareness, they empower us toward change. In Lorde's words:

When we begin to live from within outward, in touch with the power of the erotic within ourselves and allowing that power to inform and illuminate our actions upon the world around us, then we begin to be responsible to ourselves in the deepest sense. For as we begin to recognize our deepest feelings, we begin to give up, of necessity, being satisfied with suffering and self-negation and with the numbness which so often seems like the only alternative in our society. Our acts against oppression become integral with self, motivated and empowered from within.²⁷

Thus erotic power is revolutionary power. When we recognize our erotic power and the power we have to nurture life-giving relationship, we also recognize how our current social relations act against the development and exercise of this power. In fact, our current social structures are organized around relations of domination, injustice and control, which act to distort or maim our possibility for mutual, loving relationships.

Since erotic power is rooted in our sensual, embodied existence, it validates the concrete bodily experiences of physical life, of nurturing and tending the bonds of human community in the family and the wider world, of feeding,

²⁶ Feminist philosophers are beginning to define an epistemology based on emotion. See, for example, Alison Jaggar, "Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology," Women, Knowledge and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy, eds. Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

²⁷ Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic," 58.

cleaning, holding, loving, and of the everyday acts that ensure that human life will continue. This power to nurture life is a social and cultural power, historically connected with women who have been most involved in the building of human community.²⁸

In a patriarchal context the power to nurture life and relationship is devalued and assigned to women, but nevertheless it is a fundamental mode of human power and agency. The power of the concept of Eros in feminist thought is that it claims the physical, sexual, feeling and relational aspects of human existence as power. It is not merely a re-valuing of supposedly feminine characteristics but rather a revisioning of the sensual, emotional and relational realms as basic, powerful and essential to human life. As Trask states it "Eros is both love and power."²⁹ Hence, the concept of the erotic provides a vision of power alternative to the power of rule and domination characteristic of patriarchal social relations. In this way, the erotic functions as an important symbol to ground both a critique of current modes of cultural and sexual practice and ideology, and a rich vision of relationship, community and creative power.

In their theologies and christologies of erotic power,

²⁸ Some feminists including Mary Daly would argue that women have a particular "bio-philic" sensitivity, a privileged access to this life-giving power.

²⁹ Trask, 93.

Carter Heyward and Rita Brock develop the feminist Eros in a theological context and name erotic power as sacred--as the embodiment of divine presence and power among us. Within Christianity, an emphasis on the erotic underlines some of the key differences between feminist and traditional theologies. First, to emphasize Eros is to refuse to continue the mind-body and matter-spirit dualisms that have pervaded so much of Christian theology. Eros is about bodies, passion, touching. Claiming these as sacred creates an incarnational, creation-centered approach to theology. Second, the erotic emphasizes that the sacred is manifest in our relations with one another, in our power to connect with one another, to touch and be touched, to move and be moved. From this perspective, sin is manifest in unjust and abusive relationships which suppress our ability to feel and embody mutually loving and empowering relationship with each other.

Third, Eros becomes the feminist vision of Christian love--active, embodied, passionate and mutual--manifest in relationships of justice. Finally, our moral knowledge is rooted in the experience of Eros rather than in reason or moral commandment. Our deepest feelings and our bodily experiences give us an awareness about the just or unjust character of relationships in the world around us. Such experience empowers us to change relationships of injustice in the direction of greater mutuality and joyfulness. Our moral task is to work toward the embodiment of right

relationship in our common life. In summary, within feminist liberation theology the erotic is seen as our source of moral awareness and critique, our power to act toward change, and our vision of hope for human existence.

From the perspective of an erotic theology, our existence as human beings is characterized both by an original grace and by the reality of brokenheartedness and alienation.

Original Grace

An erotic theology affirms the goodness of our createdness and the sacredness of life and life-giving power.

The presence and revelation of erotic power is the divine dimension of human existence. It grows and moves with us as our resilient, flexible vulnerability that reveals our existence in relationship and our cocreation of each other. . . . As the incarnate life-giving power of the universe, divine erotic power is the Heart of the Universe.³⁰

God is our relational power--our power in mutual relation. It is from this God that you and I draw our power to be in life in the first place, and to sustain our lives in relation. In sustaining and becoming ourselves in relation, we are giving birth to more of this same sacred power who needs us, her friends, to bring her to life and help nourish her life on the earth.³¹

The erotic relational ground of our being is sacred. God is the relational power which enables us to embody relations of mutuality. This power is an erotic power which generates

³⁰ Brock, 46.

³¹ Heyward, Touching Our Strength, 23-24.

joy and justice and a desire for more relationship and which is also a power that moves against oppression and unjust death. This is the love of God moving among us.

Such an understanding of the sacred assumes an ontology based on relationality. Human beings are inherently relational creatures. "We are born in relation, we live in relation, we die in relation."³² There is no such thing as an individual self; rather, we become who we are through our interactions with one another. In Heyward's words: "Our weakness creates my I-ness and yours as well."³³

It is our active solidarity with one another that generates our discovery of who we are together and hence of who each of us is by particular name and unique yearnings and special talents.³⁴

Our lives in relation have an erotic fabric.

The ongoing relational movement is giving each of us a shape, a form, an identity that itself is constantly opening, moving, changing in relation. . . . I am touched by and touching others. I am formed by and forming people, processes, events, movements and historical situations.³⁵

Such a relational understanding of existence draws on writers such as Martin Buber and John MacMurray and on

³² Heyward, Touching Our Strength, 12.

³³ Heyward, Touching Our Strength, 21.

³⁴ Heyward, Touching Our Strength, 12.

³⁵ Heyward, Touching our Strength, 12-13.

developments in process theology and philosophy.³⁶

Catherine Keller offers an exciting feminist work from this perspective which develops a metaphysical basis for a connective relationality drawing from mythology, feminist theology, process philosophy, and psychology.³⁷

The relational basis of existence forms the starting point for Rita Brock's christology, wherein our "original grace" is that we are open and connected to one another. She argues that we are relationship-seeking beings whose hearts develop in relationship with one another. Brock develops the metaphor of heart within the context of relationship to describe both the center of the individual self and its point of connectedness to others. "Heart" is her metaphor for the human self and for our capacity for intimacy. Heart is the center, the vital core of our lives --a center of body, emotion, knowledge, memory and spirit, linking thinking, feeling and acting.³⁸ And it is through

³⁶ See Martin Buber, I and Thou, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Scribner, 1970); and John Macmurray, The Self as Agent (New York: Harper, 1957). See also A. N. Whitehead, Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology, eds. D. R. Griffin and D. W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978); and John B. Cobb and David R. Griffin, Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976).

³⁷ Keller, From a Broken Web. For a feminist argument against giving relationality ontological status see Susan Thistlethwaite, Sex, Race and God: Christian Feminism in Black and White (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 107. Thistlethwaite argues for an ontology, and a hermeneutics, of difference and conflict rather than connection.

³⁸ Brock, xiv.

heart that we are bonded with one another as our hearts touch and are touched. It is through heart that erotic power is felt and experienced. For Brock, to live with heart is to live in connection with one another.

Our original grace is the life-giving power that nurtures, sustains and enhances our lives in relationship with one another. It is the sacred and relational understanding of existence that grounds the feminist moral vision of right relationship.

We live in a relational matrix with one another in the world . . . [and] we have a common response/ability to live in mutual relation. . . . Justice, or right relation, [is] the goal and purpose of our life together on the earth."

In the experience of the erotic we know our embodied yearnings for mutuality, our desire to live in right relation with one another; we experience that sacred, life-giving power that grounds our lives together; we know our original grace.

Alienation and Brokenheartedness

We do not, however, live in a state of original grace. The structures which characterize the society in which we live do not reflect our power to live in right relation and, in fact, they act to suppress the grace-full erotic fabric of our lives.

We humans, together with other earthcreatures, are diminished in the context of late-twentieth-century capitalist global order. In this context,

" Heyward, Touching Our Strength, 16.

the capacity to love our bodies, enjoy a strong sense of self-esteem, take real pleasure in our work, and respect and enjoy either ourselves or others very much is a diminished capacity. In a very real sense, we have lost ourselves--that is, ourselves as a people, united with one another and other creatures.⁴⁰

Heyward argues that our own culture has been shaped by structures which embody alienated power relations. These structures--patriarchy, heterosexism, capitalist modes of production--depend upon and perpetrate alienated power manifest in sadomasochistic relations of domination, control, coercion and violence. Alienated power separates us from one another and denies our inherent relationality and our dependence on one another for our common good.

We live, therefore, within structures of alienated power where "the power of mutual relation is in eclipse."⁴¹ In Heyward's analysis, nonmutual power relations are demonic, taking us away from ourselves, each other and the world.⁴² Sin is lack of mutuality. We learn to fear the

⁴⁰ Heyward, Touching Our Strength, 51.

⁴¹ Heyward, Touching Our Strength, 56.

⁴² Heyward makes a distinction between mutuality, which denotes a process of sharing power, and equality which denotes positional power. She argues that relations of unequal power can in some instances, for example in the case of a parent and child or a therapist and client, be mutual relationships if both individuals are growing and changing in relation to each other and if the relationship enables growth towards more equality. In contrast, "any unequal power relationship is intrinsically abusive if it does not contain the seeds both of transformation into a fully mutual relationship and of mutual openness to equality." See Heyward, Touching Our Strength, 34-5.

relationality at the heart of existence and this fear of mutuality is deeply embedded and structured into our social organizations and psyches. Alienated power relations disempower us because we are afraid of being hurt or of hurting others and we begin to disbelieve our relational power.

Abusive power relations teach us to be afraid of erotic power--afraid, that is, of one another and of our own creative liberating power in relation. In learning to fear the erotic, we resist relating intimately with one another. In addition we are cut off from knowing and loving ourselves very well.⁴³

Within structures of alienated power our eroticism--the stirring of our relationality and our experience of being connected with one another--becomes infused with alienated power. Our bodyselves come to reflect the violence of our sadomasochistic society. For many of us, dominance and submission is all we know to be relationally possible. And yet:

Although, to some extent, everyone's eroticism is distorted by abusive power relations (of domination and control), the erotic is the sacred/godly base of our capacity to participate in mutually empowering relationships.⁴⁴

Within a context of alienation the erotic can function as a social, spiritual and political vision of the possibility of right relationship, of living for a common good and a common pleasure, of being friends and lovers with one another.

⁴³ Heyward, Touching our Strength, 187.

⁴⁴ Heyward, Touching Our Strength, 187.

For Rita Brock the family is the central place where the deformation and distortion of our erotic potential takes place. She argues that we live in a broken-hearted society where our communal existence is one of woundedness and pain. Our brokenness is most clearly manifest in the abuse and pain at the heart of our society--namely, in our families, where violence is much more common than love, mutuality or respect. Brock argues that it is primarily within the family that our hearts are broken and our selves are fragmented by patriarchal relations of hierarchical power. It is this unhealed brokenness which in turn continues patriarchal relationships of dominance and dependence.

Brock argues that the possibility of such brokenheartedness, of such sin, resides in the unavoidably relational nature of human existence. Because we are connected to one another we are dependent on the loving power of others to nurture and sustain ourselves. When such love fails, we are damaged. Our vulnerability to one another is, therefore, both the sign of our connectedness and the source of our damage. Sin emerges because our relationships have the capacity to destroy us and because we participate in that destruction when we seek to destroy ourselves or others. Because we can be hurt and can hurt others, we are afraid of our relational nature and our mutual vulnerability, and this takes us away from connectedness and mutuality with one another. We attempt to

avoid our radically relational nature in an attempt to avoid more pain. Our woundedness is the root of our continuing to hurt others.

For Brock our brokenheartedness continues because we are unable to face our pain and be healed. We do not want to face the depth of our hurt and the depths of our destructiveness--the violence in our patriarchal hearts. She believes that through acknowledging our primary relatedness we can begin to find our original grace, and the erotic life-giving power of incarnate love which can heal heart. Only through such grace can we embrace and heal the damage and suffering of our deepest selves and our society.

In summary, the consequence of our relational nature and interconnectedness is the possibility of hurt and pain, of relationships which damage rather than nurture. Because we have the power to "act-each-other-into-well-being" we also have the power to maim each other and thwart life through destructive relationships.⁴⁵ Sin is located in our ability to hurt ourselves and each other. We create or destroy each other through our relationships. It is here that we can know the grace and life-giving power of God and it is also here that we can turn our faces away from such a God so that our hearts are hardened.

Healing and Transformation

Erotic theology affirms that there is a power to heal

⁴⁵ Harrison, Making the Connections, 11.

our woundedness and transform our relationships. This power is the basic and sacred power of life, the love of God, which is born in us, heals, makes whole, empowers and liberates. Brock argues that love is the basis of all power in human life and we know it most fully in intimate, mutual relationship. It is here that healing can occur as we share our memories of hurt, our pain, and our anger in an empathic context where erotic connection can restore our hearts.

For Brock, the spiritual life is one of searching for connection, trying to live in the "play-space," open to each other and tuned to the depths of our existence, seeking the divine presence at the heart of life--the incarnate love of God. When we know that love with one another, the kin-dom of God is birthed among us.⁴⁶ This is the experience of grace, which is present among us fleetingly and partially, and is also the promise of what is yet to be. It depends upon our willingness to participate in mutuality.

From her analysis of woundedness and healing Brock develops a christology based on erotic power where "Christa/Community," rather than Jesus as an individual, becomes the locus for incarnation and salvation. She argues that the members of Jesus' whole community generated erotic power in their connectedness with one another. Through Jesus' death and resurrection the community of the church discovered its ability to heal life through erotic power

⁴⁶ See note 1 in this chapter.

expressed in community. The ongoing Christa/Community reveals the presence of this Spirit. Erotic power is brought about by the healing deeds of the church as a community of heart, courage and hope.

Brock concludes:

To trust in heart, in erotic power, is a dangerous act. To challenge the powers of destruction with compassion is an act of monumental courage. . . . To face our own brokenheartedness and to touch the depths of our fears and pains can feel like a lonely journey into death. Our dangerous memories are frightening. Yet they have the power to transform. If our species, our very planet is to survive, we must take heart. . . . Nothing else but our inborn need for self-love and for intimacy with others can sustain us and every other living thing on our planet. There, in our heartfelt connections we find the sacred mystery that births us all in a cosmic dance of erotic power.⁴⁷

Carter Heyward also places her hope and vision in the possibility of creating mutual relationship. She develops an ethics of relationship and calls us to the relational path of mutuality. It is not a sentimental path. Mutuality puts us in touch with ourselves and connects us with each other. Such touching involves conflict and tension as we reveal and assert the particularities of who we each are yet also reach through these to "our common strength, our shared vulnerability and our relational pleasure."⁴⁸

For Heyward, the path to mutuality is one we must take together. Above all, mutuality means learning to share

⁴⁷ Brock, 107.

⁴⁸ Heyward, Touching our Strength, 100.

power. We need to learn with one another in very concrete ways what it is to love one another and to share our passion and our power. We need to seek together the sacred power--

that which will liberate us from lives that do not connect in mutually empowering ways. That which will awaken our bodyselves, which have been lulled by violence and fear toward deadness, alienated from the erotic possibility of actually living as lovers of one another, ourselves and the world."

In this relational search for liberation we face the fear of expressing the "YES" within ourselves, so that we can connect with one another in love and desire and so become a relational body--a body of friends.

Heyward develops the symbol of Christa to represent this holy communion of friends. Christa can be "a christian name for eros, the power by which we know ourselves to be commonpeople."⁵⁰ For Heyward it is important that we come to know ourselves as a common people and to realize that our common body is in serious trouble. Only as a people together can we resist and shape a commitment to the well-being of us all. Heyward constructs a social ethics of relationship based on the concrete things we need to create mutual relationship and so become a body of friends. She explores courage, compassion, anger, forgiveness, touching, healing and faith as central virtues in our relational search for liberation. Heyward challenges us to faith in

⁴⁹ Heyward, Touching Our Strength, 10.

⁵⁰ Heyward, Touching our Strength, 116.

the transcendent power of Eros moving among us, touching and changing us and drawing us together. She challenges us to believe in our power in mutual relation despite the No being said all around us to friendship, justice and love.

We may feel compassion toward others, and we may be gentle with ourselves, but we do not yet really believe that this tenderness is the root of our power to change the world, beginning without our own lives. . . . We believe, yet we do not believe, in the power of the erotic to heal our brokenness and make us whole, bearers with one another of the passionate love of God.⁵¹

Erotic Selves in Relationship

In summary, what conclusions can we draw about the nature of selves and relationships envisioned in a feminist liberation theology of erotic power?

First, erotic selves are sensual, feeling, body selves who are aware of their own feelings, thoughts and needs and in touch with the world of relationships in which they live. Second, erotic selves emerge within relationships of mutuality and connection. Third, erotic selves are creative agents who know their power and agency to act to transform their worlds with one another in community. The agency of the erotic self is a moral agency which knows and accepts its response/ability in community with other selves to create relationships of mutuality and justice. In touch with their own life-power, erotic selves sense their connectedness to all life and its source in mystery and

⁵¹ Heyward, Touching our Strength, 154.

wonder.

Relationships among erotic selves are characterized by the flowering or the distortion of erotic power. It is in relationship that selves are formed and created and where their capacity for creativity and intimacy is nourished or destroyed. Abusive power relations isolate selves and create relationships of dominance and dependence maintained by control. Relations which enhance selfing and intimacy are characterized by mutuality, openness, empathy and solidarity where power is shared and erotic power flows in a fluid, dancing connectedness--where we know each other as friends who are part of a common people.

CHAPTER 3

Psychologies of Relational Selves

The feminist theologians discussed in the previous chapter have used psychological theory to deepen their understanding of the human potential for empowered selfhood and mutual relationship, and their knowledge of the ways in which this is distorted by patriarchal relations of dominance and the ways this can be healed. It is this connection that I believe can form the basis of an integrative approach to pastoral counseling. The last chapter suggests that a theology of erotic power requires a psychological model of self and relationship that emphasizes the power and creative agency of the self within a context of relationship.

From its analysis of the nature of the female selves within patriarchal social structures, feminist psychology also points to the need for a relational model of selfhood. To be adequate from a feminist perspective, such a model of relational selfhood must clearly empower the integrity and agency of individual women's selves. This chapter explores the models of relational selfhood offered by object relations theory, Catherine Keller's model of connective selfhood and the Stone Center's theory of self-in-relation

and critiques these approaches from the standpoint of the search for a model of self and relationship which describes both the integrity and agency of individual selves as well as their relational connectedness.

Feminist Psychology

Within psychology, feminist critique has centered around the insight that psychological models of human being have been written from and address the experience of males and so are inadequate in addressing the psychological reality of women's lives. This was dramatically confirmed in the early Broverman study where psychologists were asked to rank the particular characteristics which defined healthy mature selves.¹ They found that the characteristics the psychologists used to describe a healthy, mature self were the same characteristics they chose when they were asked to describe a male self. Their descriptions of female selves were characterized by qualities ranked as typical of less mature selves. This underscored the feminist intuition that within psychology women's selves are seen to be ipso facto inferior, an inferiority which the male patriarchs of

¹ Broverman et al., "Sex-Role Stereotypes," 1-7.

psychology have attempted to explain.²

Feminists have pointed out that within the psychological tradition the mature self, read male self, is autonomous and self-sufficient. His ego is well-defined with clear boundaries and he is able to act effectively to satisfy his needs in the world. Influential models of self-development, such as that of Erikson, stress individuation and separation from symbiotic ties as modes of psychological growth. Such characteristics are not those which women develop growing up within a patriarchal structure. On the contrary, raised to be the nurturers and caretakers of personal relationships, women develop skills of caring, emotional connectedness, cooperation and participation. Thus women's identity and self-esteem center around their capacity to nurture and sustain relationship. Such an identity is not valued in a patriarchal context and acts against the development of the socially valued traits of autonomy, personal achievement and competitive engagement.

Some feminists argue that any description of differences in male and female characteristics or psychologies is more reflective of destructive stereotypes

² Juliet Mitchell, Psychoanalysis and Feminism (New York: Random House, Pantheon, 1974) provides a feminist re-interpretation of Freud, and Demaris Wehr, Jung and Feminism: Liberating Archetypes, looks at Jungian theory from a feminist perspective. Naomi Goldenberg compares Freudian and Jungian influence on feminist theory in "Archetypal Theory and the Separation of Mind and Body: Reason Enough to Turn to Freud?" Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion 1 (Spring 1985): 55-72.

than of psychological reality, and needs to be avoided. Jean Baker Miller, in her influential book, Toward a New Psychology of Women, articulated the feminist stance which reclaims women's capacities for relational caring and cooperation as positive. However, she is also clear in acknowledging the devastating effects a relational orientation can have on women's selves within a patriarchal context which devalues and exploits such capacities.³

The suggestion that women's identity centers around their ability to sustain relationship, and that this contributes to the maintenance of patriarchal power structures, was given intellectual weight by Nancy Chodorow's application of object relations theory to gender development.⁴ Chodorow's detailed analysis demonstrated how unequal gender relations are reproduced in successive generations through gender-specific patterns of child-rearing which act to perpetuate patriarchal structures from one generation to the next. Chodorow starts from the fact that women do the mothering in patriarchal societies. She argues that this sexual division of labor is not a biological necessity nor is it simply due to role conditioning. The experience of being mothered by women in a society where women are devalued gives rise to two different self-structures and two different patterns of

³ Jean Baker Miller, Toward a New Psychology of Women.

⁴ Chodorow, The Reproduction of Mothering.

emotional and relational needs in men and women. Such patterns encourage the continuation of patriarchal relations in the next generation.

Chodorow argues that the female develops a relational self-structure, while the male develops a separative self-structure.

From the retention of preoedipal attachments to their mother, growing girls come to define and experience themselves as continuous with others; their experience of self contains more flexible or permeable ego boundaries. Boys come to define themselves as more separate and distinct with a greater sense of rigid ego boundaries and differentiation. The basic feminine self is connected to the world, the basic masculine self is separate.⁵

The male self-structure arises because boys are forced to develop gender identity through separation from the mother while females develop their gender identity through bonding with the mother. The male self, developed through separation, becomes sharply ego-identified, with defensive ego boundaries. Such a self-structure fits men to be workers and warriors in a competitive, achievement-oriented and rule-defined society. The emergent female self is one focussed on affiliation and affective relationships. Dependent on relationship with others for identity and security, the female self feels affirmed in the role of nurturing others and avoids conflict and competition which threaten to disrupt relationship. Women are thus socialized

⁵ Chodorow, 169.

to continue the domestic, care-taking role assigned them by patriarchal society.

This process produces male and female selves geared to fit into patriarchal social structures and relationships of dominance and submission. The ideology of a society, in this case a patriarchal social structure based on the sexual division of labor and heterosexual marriage, is passed from generation to generation through the formation of individual personalities within the family.

Chodorow believes that both male and female self-structures are lacking. Women show an underdifferentiated self-structure lacking an adequate sense of their own unique selfhood and therefore have difficulty distinguishing their own needs, feelings, and desires from those of others. The personality structure of the male discourages intimate affectionate relationship and encourages relationships of competition and power over others. Chodorow's work suggests that patriarchal social relations go much deeper than social and ideological conditioning and are built into our developing psyches. Thus the feminist task must involve "unconscious-raising"* as well as consciousness raising and requires a therapeutic approach which helps women to free

* See Sheila Ernst and Lucy Goodison, In Our Own Hands: A Book of Self-Help Therapy (London: Women's Press, 1981). Feminist therapy acknowledges the destructive effects traditional therapies can have in the lives of women; nevertheless it sees deep psychological change as a necessary part of women's liberation.

themselves from the destructive effects of their psychologically conditioned roles.

Chodorow's work has been underlined by Carol Gilligan's research on moral development in men and women. Taking issue with Erikson's developmental psychology and Kohlberg's theory of moral development, Gilligan describes how the path to mature and responsible selfhood differs for men and women. In interviews with males and females centered around moral reasoning, Gilligan confirmed gender-linked differences:

Since masculinity is defined through separation while femininity is defined through attachment, male gender identity is threatened by intimacy while female gender identity is threatened by separation. Thus males tend to have difficulty with relationships, while females tend to have problems with individuation.⁷

This plays out in moral reasoning where women wrestle with an approach to ethics based on their responsibility in relation to others while males tend to focus on individual rights. Gilligan does not, however, see men and women stuck in these self-structures. The women she interviewed underwent a clear process of maturation whereby they came to recognize their responsibility to themselves as well as others. From a conventional female understanding of morality as caring for and not hurting others, women moved through the dilemma of selfishness versus responsibility for others to a broader understanding of the interdependence of

⁷ Gilligan, 8.

self and others; the need to care for the self as well as others; the importance of honesty and integrity in relationship; and their responsibility for the choices they make in relationship. Through this process the female self comes into maturity as a moral agent while at the same time keeping her basic commitment to relationship. Gilligan argues that the corresponding male route to maturity involves the discovery that integrity does not depend on separateness, and that genuine intimacy and care can be incorporated into a strong sense of self.

While Gilligan's work challenges women to develop a strong sense of self, the fact that her understanding of male and female selves is based on gender differences which are in some sense complementary, allows the unequal social relations which underlie this complementarity and define its terms to be masked. If we only hear the message that women need to become more separate while men need to become more comfortable with intimacy, much of the power of the critique is lost. It continues to imply that there is an opposition between selfhood and intimacy and between self and other, such that to have one means to give up the other. This dooms both men and women to a never-ending balancing act between the poles of separation and intimacy.

Both Chodorow and Gilligan assume a feminist standpoint critical of patriarchal relations of male dominance and gender inequality. They state clearly the limits and

liabilities that relational selfhood brings to women. Relational selfhood fits women to be nurturers and to assume responsibility for harmonious relationship. It discourages them from traditionally male roles which require achievement, competition and self-reliance. Thus relational selves encourage women to carry out their assigned sex roles, and to live through and for others. Fluid ego boundaries can make differentiation difficult, encouraging fused relationships where one's own needs, desires and feelings are so confused with others' that one's sense of self is lost. Defining self in terms of relationship can lead to an overwhelming sense of responsibility and a debilitating sense of guilt. As a result, women often end up enmeshed in abusive and exploitative relationships. Recent literature on co-dependency and addictive relationships show how difficult it can be for women to move out of such enmeshed relationships. It takes effort to develop a strong and secure sense of selfhood, agency and power.

However, feminists have been reluctant to rid themselves of their feminine relational structure in favor of a fully autonomous selfhood. While the feminist movement has certainly emphasized the importance of women finding their own power and agency, hearing their own voices, honoring their feelings and desires, and taking charge of their lives and relationships, equally central to the

feminist vision has been an emphasis on the relational context. Meeting in groups to "hear each other into speech,"* women have offered each other support in healing the wounds of patriarchy and working toward personal and social change, stirring the fires of female friendship and connection. Many women have discovered a renewed sense of self precisely through such connections within a supportive community.

Moreover, feminist critique has analyzed the ways in which the rule of male autonomous selves in their quest for power and control has brought our planet close to extinction. The connections between male alienation, the denial of relationship and feeling, and the violence that destroys our relationships with each other and with the planet have been cogently made by Susan Griffin, Carolyn Merchant and Betty Reardon, among others.* Thus, with their sister theologians, many feminists argue that the urgency of our current social and ecological situation points to the need for a radically relational understanding of our interdependence.

From such a perspective the search for an autonomous, separate selfhood, for men or women, is ethically misguided.

* See Nelle Morton, The Journey is Home and, on female friendship, Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978).

* See, for example, Griffin, Pornography and Silence; Merchant, The Death of Nature; and Betty Reardon, Sexism and the War System (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

A feminist self must both claim its own power and agency and affirm the interrelatedness of all life, acknowledging its interdependence on a network of relationship and claiming its power to sustain connectedness and nurture relationship. This involves moving from an understanding of power as something an autonomous self exerts over others toward a view of power as emergent within relationship.

Both feminist psychologists and feminist theologians have, therefore, looked for psychological approaches offering a model of relational selfhood for women which avoids the pitfalls of diffuseness and enmeshment without succumbing to an autonomous selfhood which separates and sets self in opposition to other.

Object Relations Theory

Object-relations theory is immediately attractive in the search for a relational selfhood since it asserts that the self is formed by the internalization of its relationships with significant others. As internalized objects, relationships, rather than the drive-conflicts postulated by traditional psychoanalytic theory, are the basic ingredients from which a sense of self is shaped.¹⁰ Thus Rita Brock and Catherine Keller both draw heavily on object relations theory to ground their theological and

¹⁰ See W. Ronald Fairbairn, An Object Relations Theory of Personality (New York: Basic Books, 1962); and Donald W. Winnicott, The Maturation Process and the Facilitating Environment (London: Hogarth Press, 1965).

philosophical arguments.

Within object relations theory, the child is seen as an inherently relational being who enters into and seeks relationship with its world as soon as it is born. Family, society and culture shape the emergent self of the infant as the child internalizes its relationships with significant others. Object relations theorists focus primarily on the narcissistic, or preoedipal, stage of life where the infant and mother are closely involved with one another. The character of the relation between mother and infant becomes crucial to the development of a functioning self. Ideally, this primary relationship creates a space wherein the infant can come to know itself as distinct from the mother and as capable of taking part in intimate relationship.

According to D. W. Winnicott, the development of an adequate self depends on the presence of a "good enough mother." The good enough mother mirrors the infant back to itself with an empathy that allows the infant to be itself, to see and feel itself. The relationship of mother and infant creates a space of interaction between them in which the infant can come to know the reality of its own self as well as its connection with the mother.¹¹ The most basic example of this process is the infant's experience of touch. As Rita Brock states it, bodies are our first, closest and

¹¹ Donald W. Winnicott, Playing and Reality (New York: Basic Books, 1971).

most powerful connection to both ourselves and all else.

"The loving touch of flesh upon flesh is the first reassurance that one is a self in a world of caring selves"¹²--that is, a self in relationship with other selves.

Winnicott calls the interactive space between mother and infant a "play space." The space is neither purely intrapsychic nor purely external but partakes of both. The child discovers both its uniqueness, its own agency and feelings, and its connection to others in this space. The space is the locus of experience and creativity. Through playing in this space the child creates an inner object world which ideally both expresses the infant's own unique self and reliably reflects the world with which it is engaged. For Winnicott, the tactile, sensory, feeling self which makes its needs known and receives into itself the world around it is the infant's "true self." If the infant's needs are satisfied and its feelings received and affirmed through appropriate mirroring and empathy from the mother, the infant will develop a clear sense of self. However, if the parent cannot provide empathy and respond to the child as a unique self, the child is unable to gain a sense of self and cannot trust her environment. When the outer world does not provide love and support, the child develops a rigid, isolated, fearful self--a "false self."

¹² Brock, 21.

The ability to play is lost and with it the experience of the true self and of interactive relationship.

Alice Miller has taken this understanding of the parent-child bond as the basis of her detailed explorations of the effects of abusive parenting.¹³ If parents perceive children as beings to be shaped and controlled or as persons to meet their unmet needs for love and approval, then the mutually empathic bond which acknowledges the child's "true self" cannot be established. The child's legitimate narcissistic needs--for respect, echoing, understanding, sympathy and mirroring--are not met. As a result, the child develops a "false self" which tries to gain the love she needs through compliance with the parents' demands and/or empathy with their needs. Within such a context the child learns to suppress emotions that are unacceptable to the parent. When the nurturer disallows such feelings as jealousy, envy, anger, loneliness, impotence or anxiety, the child itself loses touch with them. As a result, the child loses touch with its "true self" and is no longer able to experience her own feelings as her own.¹⁴ Punishment and coercion also destroy the child's capacity to feel. In addition, they give the message that power and authority come through dominance. Alice Miller paints a bleak picture

¹³ Alice Miller, For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-Rearing and the Roots of Violence (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1984).

¹⁴ Alice Miller, The Drama of the Gifted Child.

of the ways in which the voices and feelings of children are silenced, ignored and punished in our society.¹⁵

Miller argues that adults with such childhood experiences grow up with an inadequate sense of self which is prey to guilt, failure and anxiety. Behind this lies depression, the feeling of emptiness and self-alienation, and a sense that life has no meaning. Because passion has been buried in infancy, narcissistically disturbed adults suffer a tragic loss of connection with any intense feeling and hence with self. The inability to feel deep emotion fosters depression. Sensuality is denied because the body carries the memory of the true self and the pain of its childhood. Such adults will relate to others in fear and will attempt to control others in order to get what they need. When these adults become parents they will look to their children to provide the empathy, understanding and unconditional love they are still seeking. Thus the cycle is repeated. Miller suggests that such narcissistic disturbance is pervasive in our culture. Families with this type of interrelationship are characterized by fusion, lack of boundaries and tight control.

Here, the connections with the erotic theology described in the last chapter, are clear. Miller shows how the child's development is distorted through abusive relationships which destroy the growing child's capacity for

¹⁵ Alice Miller, Thou Shalt Not Be Aware.

feeling and sensuality. Erotic power, the power of embodied feeling selves in relationship, is denied and crushed. Adults lose the ability to enter into mutual relations, learn to fear feeling and connection, and tend to develop relations of domination and submission.

Patriarchal Selves

The suppression of erotic power and mutual relationship continues in the process of the child's formation of gender identity. In their work on narcissistic disturbance and the false self, neither Miller nor Winnicott analyzes these issues in terms of the politics of gender. Rita Brock suggests a way of integrating Miller's analysis with Chodorow's gender analysis. Chodorow shows how female self-structures may be inadequately differentiated and prone to fusion and dependency while the male self with a rigidly defined ego is tempted to exert power over others. Brock suggests that these patriarchal options represent two poles of the false self: one lacks enough sense of self, the other enough sense of relation, to know its own experience, and to feel its own feelings. She argues that in the narcissitic wounds of men and women, structured into male and female selves, we find the roots of the violence and gender hierarchy of our society.¹⁶

Brock argues that the power of domination and control is a distortion of our primary relational power, erotic

¹⁶ Brock, 14-35.

power, which encourages connection, self-awareness, openness and vulnerability. For Brock, all forms of power emerge from erotic power. In a fused, controlling family, when a child's actions and feelings are not validated, the child has two options: wilfull assertion or continued dependency. Both are reactions of a fearful, defensive self. Separative selves rely on mastery and the need to dominate to get power, while soluble selves see power as the ability to get along with others and act through covert manipulation. The female power orientations corresponding to male dominance are, therefore, dependency and guilt. Thus we have polarized opposites--a gender-stratified system of dominance and submission fitting a social system of hierarchical power.

Both male domination and female dependency require the suppression of the self's own feelings. Relationships are fused as each depends on the other. Even the seeming independence of the separate self is an illusion, supported as it is by social structures that uphold dominance, and its continuation depends on the repression of aspects of self that threaten its control. The fused relationship prohibits a clear sense of self for either person and renders intimacy impossible. Authority replaces self-worth. Power over the other makes up for the lost sense of relation with the other, and positional power replaces a sense of personal power in relationship. These power dynamics based in fusion

are the antithesis of the erotic power that flows in mutual connection between selves.

Catherine Keller agrees that the existence of two types of selves continues destructive relations of power based on domination and submission. She names the two complementary patriarchal styles of selfhood as the "soluble self" and the "separative self."¹⁷ In talking about styles of selfhood rather than self-structures, Keller is pointing to the constructive nature of selfhood. We "selve" as we learn different patterns of identity and relationship. This move away from static structure toward an appreciation of process, fluidity and interaction is reflected in many recent feminist philosophies which increasingly argue against the idea of a fixed personality.¹⁸

Keller's major thesis is that "separation and sexism have functioned together as the most fundamental self-shaping assumptions of our culture."¹⁹ Patriarchal structures of male domination depend upon and sustain a model of self as "heroic ego"--the autonomous self which

¹⁷ Keller, 4.

¹⁸ See, for example, the following articles in Women, Knowledge and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy, eds. Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989): Caroline Whitbeck, "A Different Reality: Feminist Ontology," 51-76; Ann Ferguson, "A Feminist Aspect Theory of the Self," 93-107; and Maria Lugones, "Playfulness, 'World'-Traveling, and Loving Perception," 275-90. French feminist theory also deconstructs the notion of unified selfhood. For example, see Luce Irigaray, This Sex Which is Not One.

¹⁹ Keller, 2.

separates itself from others. Women are excluded from such a model of selfhood. As the "other" from whom the hero needs to disentangle himself, women and intimacy are threatening to the male ego. Women's "selfhood" is tied into service of the male to provide the "sticky" connections, the relations that hold together individual male selves, and women's sense of selfhood becomes diffuse and diluted.²⁰

Keller suggests that an object relations analysis "underemphasizes the work of social and ideological structures beyond the family in requiring, exploiting and institutionalizing that sexism to which the family structure already tends."²¹ Our current structures of interaction at all levels of social existence militate against the development of mutual relationship and encourage relationships of dominance and submission. Thus there is a need to look at the developmental process across the life-cycle rather than just in early childhood, to broaden the feminist analysis of the psychological forces that shape destructive patterns of relationship.

Adolescence, for example, is a crucial time in the formation of female selfhood as social expectations and peer relationships begin to impact the young woman's developing sense of self. Gilligan notes that "the 'I' who spoke

²⁰ Keller, 7-15.

²¹ Keller, 131.

clearly at eleven becomes in adolescence 'confused.'²² She argues that women's sense of self becomes submerged in adolescence due to the conflict between the young woman's desire to care and nurture relationships and the belief that avoiding hurt in relationships requires the silencing of one's own needs. Such confusion is not resolved until "the discovery that responsiveness to self and responsiveness to others are connected rather than opposed"²³--a discovery which marks the transition to mature agency for women, where "assertion no longer seems dangerous [and] the concept of relationships changes from a bond of continuing dependence to a dynamic of interdependence."²⁴ A concern to understand the emergence and development of women's sense of self across the life-cycle in the context of a broad range of relationships motivates the work of Harriet Goldhor Lerner²⁵ and the self-in-relation theorists to be discussed below.

In addition to a concern for the whole life-cycle, psychological analysis needs to address wider social structures. There are few places in our society where individuals are encouraged to experience their feelings and their body-selves; few places where loving relationship can

²² Gilligan, 61.

²³ Gilligan, 61.

²⁴ Gilligan, 149.

²⁵ Harriet Goldhor Lerner, Women in Therapy (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1988).

allow for healing childhood wounds; few places where erotic power can emerge in mutual relation.

The broader social embeddedness of patriarchal styles of selfhood is addressed by Starhawk in her development of a "liberation psychology." Starhawk names the "self-hater" as the internalized manifestation of power-over.

Although an abusive or authoritarian family will strengthen its grip, it is no anomaly produced by a particular family constellation. The self-hater is the literal embodiment of structures of domination. In this culture it possesses us all.²⁶

Starhawk analyzes in depth the ways in which the self-hater is systemically sustained and reinforced. She goes on to describe how the power of the self-hater can be defused within relational contexts structured in ways which foster liberation and "restore to their participants a sense of immanent, inherent value."²⁷

The fused patriarchal relationships of dominance and submission described above are similar to the co-dependent and addictive relationships described by Anne Wilson Schaef, Melody Beattie and others.²⁸ Anne Wilson Schaef argues that our whole society is based on addictive patterns of relating

²⁶ Starhawk, Truth or Dare: Encounters with Authority, Power and Mystery (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 96.

²⁷ Starhawk, Truth or Dare, 97.

²⁸ Schaef, Co-Dependence: Misunderstood, Mistreated, and Escape From Intimacy; and Melody Beattie, Codependent No More, and Beyond Codependency.

and this is what we learn throughout our lives."²⁹ An addictive relationship is an interlocked system where both persons feel they cannot survive without the relationship and where each partner tries to get the other to meet their needs. Neither person feels whole on their own. Schaef states that the partners become increasingly controlling, especially of themselves and what they feel, because the relationship must be maintained at all costs. Control and enmeshment or abandonment become the only options. To stay in the relationship cuts off one's "internal information system," so that the self becomes progressively numb to its own feelings, yet to leave feels terrifying because it opens up a void inside. The life in such a relationship is soon sucked dry. As needs fail to be met the partners become increasingly isolated from and controlling of each other. Intimacy is ostensibly sought but actually is avoided at all costs, since intimacy involves giving up control, risking openness and vulnerability, and being present to one's own feelings and to the other. Naming the social and political, as well as psychological, roots of such an addictive relationality can empower women, and men, to move toward an engaged intimacy where one can be present with oneself and others--in Schaef's words, "loving someone . . . while staying with yourself and fully participating in your own

²⁹ Anne Wilson Schaef, When Society Becomes an Addict (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987).

life."³⁰

The first essential requirement for intimacy, according to Schaef, is intimacy with the self: "we have to know who we are, what we feel, what we think, what our values are, what is important to us, and what we want."³¹ We have to "live our own process" before we can share ourselves with others. Further, intimacy requires taking responsibility for the relationship, giving up the illusion of control, and being honest about our feelings and needs. "As we try to live in process ... we open the door to new ways of relating and being with one another."³² Intimate relationships are always moving and cannot be controlled. They are a gift. Schaef relates intimacy to the I-Thou relationship described by Buber:

The I-Thou is a covenant relationship. . . . In that kind of relationship, both or all persons involved have a relationship that is expanding, in process, done with respect, a process that facilitates spirituality and is alive and living. . . . When we are living out of our sobriety (Spirituality-process) all life, including our own, is treated like a Thou, and relationships are reflective of the sacred."³³

Thus Schaef, with the feminist theologians discussed earlier, relates intimacy to the knowledge of our own feeling experience and to the discovery of the sacred; and

³⁰ Schaef, Escape From Intimacy, 137.

³¹ Schaef, Escape From Intimacy, 123.

³² Schaef, Escape From Intimacy, 131.

³³ Schaef, Escape From Intimacy, 157-58.

points to the power to be found in mutuality for recovery and healing from destructive relationships.

The addictive relationships of separative and soluble selves reflect the oppressive nature of the power dynamics within our society which continue to produce wounded selves from generation to generation. In looking for an alternate model of selfhood, one where both the agency of selves and their relational context will be honored, some theorists have tried explicitly to develop their own models of relational selfhood. This rest of this chapter will explore Catherine Keller's model of a "connective self," and the model of self-in-relation being developed by feminist psychologists at the Stone Center at Wellesley College.

Keller's Connective Self

Following her analysis of sexism and its manifestation in patriarchal selves and power relations of dominance and submission, Catherine Keller presents her own model of the "connective self" which she contrasts to the male separative self and female soluble self of patriarchy.

When women attempt to move out of soluble selfhood, the temptation, as discussed above, is for them to seek for themselves the separative, autonomous self lauded by patriarchy. Keller argues against the goal of a separate, autonomous self for either men or women, since she believes that any emphasis on a separative self implicitly contains a fear of woman and the bond with the mother. She believes

that, in fact, women do not want a separate self but rather "an empowering center in themselves" which will liberate them from relational bondage into worlds in which new forms of connection can take place.³⁴ Thus it is not women's definition in terms of relationship that is the problem but rather their bondage to particular types of connection which are exploitative of women's selves.

Using object relations theory as a starting point, Keller wants to show how a connective self can emerge from the relational bond of infancy. She argues that the selfhood of the preoedipal bond, "despite the threat of an undifferentiated narcissism, must and can be cultivated into maturity rather than stifled and superseded."³⁵ It is only through differentiation within the relational bond that a mature, centering and self-affirming sense of relation can emerge where relationship will no longer be defined in terms of separation and control.

In Chodorow's and Gilligan's analysis the feminine association with relational empathy arises from the social circumstances of patriarchy. They can, therefore, "only oppose 'masculine' ego-differentiation to 'feminine' connectedness."³⁶ But Keller wants to prioritize connectedness and to talk about differentiation within

³⁴ Keller, 3.

³⁵ Keller, 140.

³⁶ Keller, 161.

relational connections, where differentiation means something different from separation. Keller argues that for a relational, connective self to be something more than the result of patriarchal family structure, we need a metaphysics of "the interrelatedness of all subjective life."³⁷ Keller believes that a feminist vision has such an underlying metaphysical stance since metaphors of webs and websters, spinning networks and connections, weave their way through feminist writings. As we have seen Brock's theology of erotic power also sees connectivity as ontologically fundamental, and as the locus of erotic power and sacred presence.

If interrelatedness is the fundamental reality of the universe, then each self is connected with other selves. The separative ego structure encouraged in male development is built on a fallacy, for we can never get away from our fundamental connectedness with one another. Historically, male development is, in Keller's words, "a massive structure of defense . . . against the fact of internal relations with all that is other."³⁸ The traditional female self developing with more fluid ego boundaries is more open to sensing and acting in harmony with connectedness. However, the emergence of full selfhood in females is hampered by restrictions which prevent adequate differentiation within

³⁷ Keller, 149.

³⁸ Keller, 189.

the relational matrix.

A Dynamic Multiplicity

The common presupposition of most Western thought is that "to be a single individual is to be an enduring, self-identical substance, essentially independent from others."³⁹ Within this view "selves are supposed to be identifiable as more or less consistent unities enduring through their histories and clearly marked off from each other in space."⁴⁰ For patriarchal selves, relations between self and other are external to the self which ideally can exist on its own. To be a self is to be set apart from, over and against, the other and the world. The only alternative to separation seems to be solubility or merger into an undifferentiated unity with other selves. A feminist metaphysics of relationality therefore requires a reformulation of the concept of the self. To be a self must no longer to be substance separate and apart from other selves. Selves must be internally, not externally, related to one another within a pluralistic and interdependent world of relations. Uniqueness, freedom, creativity, wisdom and individuality must evolve from, and be constituted by, a wide net of relations.

Keller proposes the model of a connective self as an alternate concept of the self to that of an enduring

³⁹ Keller, 162.

⁴⁰ Keller, 162-63.

substance. The connective self she describes is a composite, or multiple, self. She argues that a connective self knows itself as "several yet not dispersed."⁴¹ Keller believes that many women experience such a sense of self; one which includes multiplicity. We experience ourselves belonging to a network of relations and our subjectivity, that internal sense of who we are, reflects a complexity of internal relations. For Keller, selves are composite in two dimensions.

My many selves [are] the fabric of other persons, plants, places--all the actual entities that have become part of me--and my many selves [are] the necklace of experiences that make up my personal history from birth to now. These selves are all there; if I acknowledge their influence, they become part of the community of my psyche, working together even through the most painful contrasts of desire, through seemingly irreconcilable differences of perspective, to produce the integration of a greater complexity of feeling.⁴²

Keller bases this concept of a self which composes itself out of many selves on process metaphysics.

In process philosophy, actual entities are events and not substances or things.⁴³ They become--that is come into being--through the "prehension" of their relations. "The particular individual is then a pulse of experience in which

⁴¹ Keller takes this image from the work of Luce Irigaray (This Sex Which is Not One) and develops her own theory in relation to Irigaray's understanding of the multiple, everchanging self of women. Keller, 163.

⁴² Keller, 227.

⁴³ See Whitehead, Process and Reality.

the world is brought in by feeling."⁴⁴ The entity experiences (prehends) the many influences and relations of the world and in this experience creates a new subjective oneness. Because each entity has a unique particular spatio-temporal perspective on the world, each entity is unique, as it emerges out of the process of "feeling" its world from its particular perspective. Feeling reaches out to make the realities of the world there, real here, in this moment, as a complex synthesis of feeling. This is the process of "concrecence" through which the subject emerges from the world of others. Keller argues that it is through the process of concrecence that connective selves compose themselves of their relations.⁴⁵

Keller's vision of a composite, connective self also draws upon William James' understanding that the self was composed by the relational flux of "pure experience" streaming through consciousness, rather than a discrete substance underlying experience. James' idea of subjectivity involves an epistemological shift. We come to know the world and our existence as selves through feeling and experience rather than through rational reflection, and relations themselves, rather than things, are the reality

⁴⁴ Keller, 183.

⁴⁵ Keller, 182-99.

from which our experience is constructed.⁴⁶ Keller points to the connection here with the modern feminist concern for an epistemology of feeling and critique of the effect of supposedly objective reason divorced from experience.⁴⁷

A Connective Integrity

The self described by Keller is, then, social, dynamic, and composite. Is there any sense of personal identity or integrity for such a self? The connective self does have a unique identity. It is "the unique immediate event where an experience takes place and where the world is gathered as a unique composition."⁴⁸ It feels its way into existence, takes in the world and lets itself go into the world influencing its ongoing movement. However, the integrity, or oneness, of the connective self is multiple. It composes itself from its surrounding influences, in such a way that the moments of selfhood themselves form a transtemporal society. In Keller's words:

Feeling the many--in whatever subtle and slightly new, barely conscious way I can--I am many. Composing myself of these many ones, I become one. Now I let myself go.

⁴⁶ William James, "A World of Pure Experience," Essays in Radical Empiricism (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1912). George Herbert Mead also understood the self to be composed from, though not defined by, the environment. For Mead, the self has two phases, the "me" which is the organized self constituted by the community and the "I" which is the creative and unique response to the me. See Mead, Mind, Self and Society.

⁴⁷ See Jaggar, "Love and Knowledge."

⁴⁸ Keller, 195.

Then my oneness will contribute itself to the pool of the many, as a sort of kinetic energy for all the future ones I willy-nilly influence."⁴⁹

Keller argues that the connective self mirrors the world from its own unique perspective and the degree of differentiation achieved by the self--the degree to which it is different and unique--depends on its openness to the inflowing world. The world provides the materials which the self works into "the creative contrasts patterning the final complex feeling."⁵⁰ Differentiation thus depends on the self's ability to embrace its own freedom and compose itself spontaneously. If feeling and connection are repressed there is less material to work with. Width of connection deepens the depth of feeling and the complexity of the self's composition.

In the process of self-composition the inflowing world is prehended into a subjective whole; however, this is not a simple unity.⁵¹ Contrast, conflict and multiplicity remain part of the complete experience. The never-ending task of the personality is to create a many-selved integrity in each moment of self-composition. The integrity of the connective self emerges as it spins itself out of many and weaves itself back into the many. The multiple integrity of the

⁴⁹ Keller, 228.

⁵⁰ Keller, 190.

⁵¹ Keller, 204.

self does not, therefore, provide a rigid self-identity. It "takes the image of an unending stream, never a finished monument."⁵²

In Keller's argument the solitude, freedom and creativity of the connective self resides in the subjective moment of self-composition. In every act of self-creation there is a moment of solitude where concrescence takes place. Concrescence is based on the creative contrasts between the actual (the in-flowing world and previous selves) and the possible (the open future and the attraction of its many possibilities). Through these contrasts the many are woven into one complete experience which depends on the self's own creativity and purposefulness.

Weaving together the contrasting fibers of experience does not produce a mere recombination of what has gone before; the primal empathy by which the past is spun into present feeling is necessary but not yet enough. Only a unique twist of perspective, a fresh pulse of subjectivity, makes something new.⁵³

It is here that the self has a sense of its own purposeful activity. The individual adds something new and unique and is thus both undefined by any particular relation as well as inseparable from an infinitely extended community.

There remains the possibility that the complexity of the in-flowing world will not be well integrated. The multitude of often conflicting inputs can lead to a chaotic,

⁵² Keller, 226.

⁵³ Keller, 231.

confused self where the self is sucked into the undertow of now this, now that influence or relationship. Or the self can be lost in over-identification with one relationship. The task of self-composition, therefore, has its dangers: "If I cannot claim these many, if I exclude great portions of them as contradictory to my make-up, they may wait to pull me into depression or to erupt into destructive violence."⁵⁴ Traditional feminine selves, Keller believes, are encouraged to remain chaotic and diffuse rather than integrating their connectedness into a coherent, though still multiple, whole.⁵⁵

Achieving a multiple, well-integrated self involves being aware of our emotions--the primal feelings which arise from the preceding selves and the world flowing into our awareness and from which we compose ourselves. These emotions may be conflicting and multiple. To learn to trust them requires an ongoing discipline of listening for deeper causes and letting go of obsessive patterns characterized by "stuckness." The flow of emotions--motions of soul--keep us

⁵⁴ Keller, 227. Keller suggests that multiple personalities show the limits of normalcy here. "The fine differentiations by which multiplicity is sustained are also the fault-lines at which the psyche cracks after too much quaking," p. 226.

⁵⁵ The soluble and separative selves of patriarchy make up a "two-part caricature" of an integral self. The male is all self with no connection and assumes the solitude, freedom and creativity of self-composition, while the female becomes connection without self. Her self-dissolution glues together male ego-moments. Keller, 205.

in motion, responsive, plural."³⁶ It is out of these that we compose ourselves in a creative and purposeful response. The wider the connections that we can feel and integrate, the more complex and original the self that we weave.

Keller argues, then, against any strict identity of self from past to future. She sees the attempt to maintain a strict self-identity over time, and rigid ego boundaries in the present, as part of the patriarchal self's desperate struggle to maintain its separateness. In such a struggle, permanence and control come to be valued over spontaneity and connection, and agency comes to be seen as the power to control and externally manipulate others. The agency of the connective self is not one of control. The connective self is empowered by others and, in its creative response, it can exercise powerful influence on the supervening world. Keller lists challenging, tugging, inspiring, coalescing and planning as some of its modes of influence. The connective self is free to act responsively, responsibly and creatively.

If I can live with the light, butterfly continuity of soul, and the amassed, changing commune of body, forfeiting the rigid self-identities of the ego, I become not less but more responsible. Rhythmically entraining with my world, I can respond to its desires. I become ever more

³⁶ Keller, 227. Keller quotes Mary Daly's distinction between primary passions, which energize and inform feminist selves, and the potted passions which feminine selves are encouraged to feel which repress energy for action and change. See Daly, Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).

skillful in the space-time dance of self with other, of same with different, of here with there. Freed really to feel the others in their claims upon my future, I will need neither to tense up in defensive rebellion against their influence nor to comply in self-aborting imitation of their impulses.⁵⁷

Keller argues that the multiple integrity of the connective self, while always unfinished, is no less whole or coherent than that of a closed substance or an exclusive individual. It is an individuality which comes about by a radical inclusion, rather than exclusion, of the world. The desire to exclude "signals the cowardice that breaks the web."⁵⁸ Connective integrity "unbreaks the brokenness by weaving the fragments into a new--if provisional--whole."⁵⁹

Self-in-Relation Theory

While Keller provides a philosophical framework for understanding a connective relational selfhood, the most developed psychological model of relational selfhood is the self-in-relation theory being developed by feminist psychologists working at the Stone Center in Wellesley, Massachusetts--among them Jean Baker Miller, Janet Surrey, Irene Stiver, Alexandra Kaplan and Judith Jordan.⁶⁰ Their work directly addresses the task of building a psychological

⁵⁷ Keller, 247.

⁵⁸ Keller, 228.

⁵⁹ Keller, 228.

⁶⁰ The Stone Center for Developmental Services and Studies at Wellesley College is a center for psychotherapy and research in psychological development.

model which affirms the centrality of relationality to psychological maturity, and addresses many of the feminist concerns described above.⁶¹ Carter Heyward relates her theology of erotic power not to object relations theory but to this emerging psychological theory of self-in-relation.⁶²

In contrast to Freudian and object relations perspectives which stress, respectively, sexuality and emotional connectedness as areas of human necessity and experience, the Stone Center psychologists are moving toward a psychology which addresses a third equally crucial necessity and possibility of human experience--"the potential for both cooperation and creativity." Jean Baker Miller argues that "the thwarting of these necessities, the blocking of these needs, produces as many, or more, problems than anything so far delineated in psychodynamics" and refers to this concern as "the third stage of psychoanalysis."⁶³

From the Stone Center perspective, a person is never

⁶¹ See Jean Baker Miller, The Development of a Women's Sense of Self, Work in Progress, no. 12 (Wellesley: Stone Center, Wellesley College, 1984); and Janet L. Surrey, Self-in-Relation: A Theory of Women's Development, Work in Progress, no. 13 (Wellesley: Stone Center, Wellesley College, 1985).

⁶² Margaret Craddock Huff has also begun to explore the Stone Center concept of self-in-relation in relation to models of the human person emerging in feminist theology. She suggests that such a concept can be used creatively in pastoral counseling theory. See Huff, "The Interdependent Self."

⁶³ Jean Baker Miller, Toward a New Psychology, 43-44.

just a self, but is always a "self-in-relation" with other selves. Persons develop by coming more wholly into their relational power rather than through learning to be separate selves. Hence maturity is manifest in relational competence--the capacity to relate to others in mutually enhancing ways--and development is a process of learning to live well with one another.⁴⁴ It is within connectedness with others that we are able to recognize and value our own uniqueness and so experience a strong sense of self-in-relation. As a result, psychological health depends on participation in mutually empathic and empowering relationships.

The emphasis on relational maturity, rather than on the internal structure of the self or personality, places the emergence of both self and relationship in the interaction between persons. This is different from Chodorow and Gilligan who both assume an internal self-structure which is relatively fixed. Like Keller's connective self, the Stone Center model of self-in-relation reflects a constructive and representational model of self which is open to change in relational interactions.

Christa McNerney provides an excellent overview of the

⁴⁴ As Carter Heyward points out, by upholding the primacy of relation, the Stone Center therapists are not suggesting that women live for others, as their traditional roles encourage, or that they live for themselves, but rather that they live with others. They believe that we can learn to live well with one another in growth-enhancing relationships. Heyward, Touching Our Strength, 14.

Stone Center's self-in-relation theory and argues that self-in-relation theory differs significantly from object-relations theory in ways which make it much more adequate as a psychological grounding for the feminist theological vision of human relationality and for the relational practice of pastoral counseling.⁶⁵ She uses self-in-relation theory to look at the fragmentation and healing of selves broken by childhood sexual abuse and relates this to a feminist theological understanding of sin and reconciliation.

McNerney describes how self-in-relation theorists see object relations theory as inadequate for a psychological theory of relationality, despite its shift away from the instinctual, libidinal, drive theory of traditional psychoanalysis toward a focus on the need for affiliative relationship and an emphasis on an empathic context as necessary for psychological growth. The Stone Center psychologists point out that object relations theory is still located in drive theory, despite the shift from libidinal to attachment drives, and this continues to suggest that self-gratification is the primary motivating factor in psychological growth. Moreover, as reflected in its very terminology, object relations theory tends toward the objectification of relational others who become internalized objects characterized by their ability to

⁶⁵ McNerney, 54-90.

fulfil or frustrate the self's basic needs. Furthermore, an emphasis on the originally symbiotic merger of infancy stresses a later separation or individuation process which suggests an autonomous self and supports a hierarchical stage theory where relationship is relegated to infancy. Finally, the empathic activity that object relations theory sees as crucial to self-development is uni-directional where the mother/parent shows empathic responsiveness to the infant's needs."

In contrast to object relations theory, self-in-relation theory sees human nature as mutually interactive so that interaction, not gratification, is the motivational force of human development. Thus the goal of relationship is not self-gratification of affiliative needs but mutual giving and receiving. Psychological growth occurs within an ongoing connectedness to others, within which, rather than in separation from, human selves grow toward greater differentiation. The goal of development is not autonomy but relational competence and the developmental process is one of learning to build mutually empowering relationships. At all stages, not just in childhood, relating is central to development and empathy is bilateral. Such empathy provides the ambience for growth and develops in complexity and possibility as selves mature.

" Mc Nerney, 60-70.

Stern's Theory of Infant Development

Although the focus of the Stone Center psychologists' work is not on infancy but on exploring the kinds of relationships that can foster growth and development throughout the life-cycle, they draw support for their work from the theory of infant development developed by child psychologist Daniel Stern.⁶⁷ From his experimental work with mothers and infants, Stern argues against any sense of infancy as a state of undifferentiated merger. He argues that a sense of self and relationship are present together in the first weeks of life, empathic caring and responsivity is mutual between mother and infant, and such interaction matures in complexity as new interactive possibilities emerge with the infant's growing cognitive and affective capabilities.

Stern proposes a developmental model of the infant's subjective experience of self and other, as follows. From birth an infant is endowed with observable capacities for perception, reflection and affectivity, which mature. As new capacities become available, the infant organizes its resulting subjective experience into perspectives about itself and others. In the first two months of life the infant has an emergent sense of self as it actively makes connections and integrates its complex experience of the

⁶⁷ Daniel N. Stern, The Interpersonal World of the Infant: A View from Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

world. As it discovers self-invariant and self-directed properties, these begin to coalesce into the subjective sense of self and other. Between two and six months this emergent self has integrated its social experience into the sense of a core self and a core other, within a relational domain, or context, of core-relatedness. Here, infants know that they and their mothers are separate physically and are different agents with their own affective experience, yet they also experience being-with another. This experience of being-with reflects an active integration and awareness of self with other and differs from the self-other fusion assumed in object relations theory. In Stern's words:

The subjective world of infants is deeply social. They experience a sense of core self and other, and along with these, they experience a pervasive sense of self being with other in multiple forms. All of these forms of being with are active constructions. They will grow and become elaborated in the course of development, a process that results in the progressive socializing of experience."

From seven to nine months a new subjective sense of self and other opens up when the infant becomes aware that self and other are not only core entities--characterized by physical presence, action, affect and continuity--but they also have subjective mental states--feelings, motives and intentions. This opens a new domain of relational possibility, which Stern calls intersubjective relatedness, where mental states of self and other can now be attuned and

" Stern, 123.

aligned, thus offering new possibilities for interaction. At around fifteen to eighteen months, another sense of self becomes possible as the infant comprehends that self and other have a store of personal knowledge and experience which can be communicated with one another through symbols; thus the sense of a verbal self emerges and the domain of verbal relatedness with others becomes a reality.

Stern argues that the differing senses of self and domains of relatedness all remain active throughout life and remain as "distinct forms of experiencing social life and self."⁶ Each represents an active integration and construction of subjective experience. Within each domain of interrelatedness, awareness and experience of self and other emerge through mutual interaction and attunement where both the experience of self-versus-other (I am different from you) as well as self-with-other (I and you are part of we) emerge together. At the level of core-relatedness this comes through the experience of physical interaction and intimacy. In intersubjective relatedness the experience of empathic affect attunement fosters self-other differentiation and connection, while in the domain of verbal relatedness this occurs in the experience of shared meanings.

All domains of relatedness therefore depend on self-initiated interaction, responsivity and sensitivity to the

⁶ Stern, 32.

other. A mother unable to attune and respond to her infant's subjective state and social actions, or an infant unable to perceive the parent's subjective state, will have difficulty developing a strong sense of self and agency in relationship. Although Stern does point to age-specific sensitive periods, within his theory pathological self-development is not restricted to infancy because all relational domains remain as social experiences throughout life. Hence, damage to one's sense of self and capacity for relationship can occur throughout life.

Stern's model of infant development, grounded convincingly in the empirical observation of infant behavior, offers a compelling theory of the emergence of relational selfhood. Self is emergent in relationships of mutual interaction and the experience of self, other and relationship emerge together. They are experienced in different relational domains through physical, affective and verbal modes of interaction and intersubjective attunement.

The Self-in-Relation

The psychologists at the Stone Center focus on how this relational experience of self and other evolves throughout life in differing relational contexts. They have begun to define the nature of relationships which foster the development of a mature relationality--a being-with another

which includes a clear sense of self.⁷⁰ They have also begun to explore the disconnections and violations within relationship which result in a confused sense of self.⁷¹ A primary focus has been to describe the development of mature relational competence as it evolves in the mother-daughter relationship from childhood to adulthood.⁷²

The Stone Center psychologist's basic thesis is that healthy psychological growth takes place within "growth-enhancing" relationships which foster the continuing development of all people within them. "As the quality of the relationships grow, the individual grows. Each individual can develop a larger and more complex repertoire and can contribute to, and grow from, more complex relationships."⁷³ Thus growth is motivated and sustained through enhanced connectedness. Jean Baker Miller describes

⁷⁰ Jean Baker Miller, What Do We Mean by Relationships? Work in Progress, no. 22 (Wellesley: Stone Center, Wellesley College, 1986); Surrey, Self-in-Relation; Judith V. Jordan, The Meaning of Mutuality, Work in Progress, no. 23 (Wellesley: Stone Center, Wellesley College, 1986); Irene Stiver, The Meaning of "Dependency" in Female-Male Relationships, Work in Progress, no. 11 (Wellesley: Stone Center, Wellesley College, 1984).

⁷¹ Jean Baker Miller, Connections, Disconnections and Violations, Work in Progress, no. 33 (Wellesley: Stone Center, Wellesley College, 1988).

⁷² See Jean Baker Miller, The Development of a Woman's Sense of Self; Surrey, Self-in-Relation; Alexandra Kaplan, R. Klein and N. Gleason, Women's Self Development in Late Adolescence, Work in Progress, no. 17 (Wellesley: Stone Center, Wellesley College, 1985).

⁷³ Jean Baker Miller, Connections, Disconnections, 3

the nature of an empowering, interactive process as one in which five good things happen: each person feels a greater zest for life; each person feels more able to act and does act; each person has a more accurate picture of herself and the other; each person feels a greater sense of worth; and each person feels more connected to the other and a greater motivation for connections with other people outside the relationship.⁷⁴

Growth-enhancing relationships depend crucially on mutuality and empathy, two concepts which have been explored in detail by self-in-relation theorists.

Mutuality

Judith Jordan describes the mutual intersubjectivity which underlies mutuality in relationship as requiring the following for each person in the relationship:

- (1) an interest in and cognitive-emotional awareness of and responsiveness to the subjectivity of the other person through empathy,
- (2) a willingness and ability to reveal one's inner states to the other person, to make one's needs known, to share one's thoughts and feelings, giving the other access to one's subjective world . . . ; (3) the capacity to acknowledge one's needs without consciously or unconsciously manipulating the other to gain gratification. . . ; (4) valuing the process of knowing, respecting and enhancing the growth of the other; (5) establishing an interacting pattern in which both people are open to change in the interaction.⁷⁵

In a mutual relationship, therefore, both individuals have

⁷⁴ Jean Baker Miller, What Do We Mean By Relationships?

⁷⁵ Jordan, The Meaning of Mutuality, 2-3.

an investment in the process of relating itself and feel that it has intrinsic value for both self and other. Mutuality in relationships involves sharing both receptivity and initiative, influencing and being influenced by the other, recognizing and appreciating the other's wholeness, and making room for conflicting feelings, thoughts and differences. Mutuality also includes mutual responsibility for the relationship--"taking care of the relationship"--so that it continues to be energizing and empowering and each participant can develop an increasing sense of relational and empathic competence. Such competence is reflected by the ability to "act in relationship" which Janet Surrey names "response/ability."⁷⁶

Janet Surrey lists three central components of mutuality: (1) mutual engagement--that is, interest in and attention to the inner life and experience of the other; (2) mutual empathy--the affective-cognitive experience of sharing in, responding to and understanding the psychological state of the other; and (3) mutual empowerment--experienced as increased energy to act within the relationship and in the rest of one's life.

In such empowering interaction, both people feel able to have an impact on each other and on the movement or "flow" of the interaction. Each feels "heard" and "responded to" and able to "hear," "validate," and "respond to" the other. . . . The

⁷⁶ Janet L. Surrey, Relationship and Empowerment, Work in Progress, no. 30 (Wellesley: Stone Center, Wellesley College, 1987), 6.

capacity to be "moved," and to respond, and to "move" the other, represents the fundamental core of relational empowerment."⁷⁷

The experience of self-empowerment and self-differentiation that occurs within connectedness is experienced as clarity about both self and other and as relational authenticity; it is not experienced as autonomy or independence. Clarity about one's own thoughts, feelings and desires emerges, along with clarity about the other's, through the mutually empathic process.

In a mutually empathic relationship each individual allows and assists the other to come with focussed energy more fully into his or her own truth or reality and into relationship."⁷⁸

Each person sees themselves and the other more clearly and experiences energy to act as a purposeful, integral self. A profound sense of personal integrity also emerges from the experience of relational authenticity--the experience of being able to be oneself in relationship--to know, express and act on one's feelings and thoughts and so that one is real, vital, purposeful and honest in relationship."⁷⁹ In self-in-relation theory, therefore, the integrity of the self is given through self-clarity, empowerment for action, and relational authenticity.

⁷⁷ Surrey, Relationship and Empowerment, 6-7.

⁷⁸ Judith V. Jordan, Clarity in Connection: Empathic Knowing, Desire and Sexuality, Work in Progress, no. 29 (Wellesley: Stone Center, Wellesley College, 1987), 4.

⁷⁹ Surrey, Relationship and Empowerment, 9.

Empathy

Empathy is "the process through which one's experienced sense of basic connection and similarity to other humans is established."⁸⁰ The Stone Center psychologists argue that empathy is foundational to mutually enhancing relationships. Judith Jordan describes empathy as a learned skill which has both affective and cognitive components. It involves both surrendering to the feeling state of the other and comprehending, distinguishing and interpreting that state. In order to empathize, one must have a well-differentiated self and an appreciation of the differentness as well as the sameness of the other.

The empathic capacity necessary for mutually enhancing relationships also requires selves-in-relation which have fluid ego-boundaries.

Self-boundary flexibility is important since there is an "as if," trying-out quality in which one places oneself in the other's shoes or looks through the other's eyes. There is a momentary overlap between self and other representations.⁸¹

Jordan argues that affective arousal and cognitive functioning work together in a process of assimilation and accommodation where the other's experiences are assimilated into one's own memories and constructions and where one accommodates to match the other's thought and feeling more

⁸⁰ Judith V. Jordan, Empathy and Self Boundaries, Work in Progress, no. 16 (Wellesley: Stone Center, Wellesley College, 1984), 2.

⁸¹ Jordan, Empathy and Self Boundaries, 3.

clearly. It is precisely in the empathic connection with others, when self-other representation and identification overlap, that one develops a more articulated and differentiated image of the other in relation to the self, and is therefore able to respond in a more accurate and specific way. The experience of "we-ness" enhances rather than disrupts the experience of "I-ness" and "you-ness." Thus fluidity of self-boundaries enables clarity and differentiation rather than diffusing it.

Jordan also points out that empathic capability may be restricted to certain relational situations and affective experiences. Thus, for example, it may be hard for a woman to attune empathically to another's anger if her own anger is not acceptable to her. "As there is a narrowing of which affects are appropriate for the self, there also may be a curtailment of empathic responsiveness."⁸² Empathic failures can occur in relationships when individuals are either unable "to relax self-boundaries enough to allow the affective flow necessary for empathic connection," or unable to sustain a sense of boundedness which leaves one vulnerable to another's affective state.⁸³ The latter state seems to occur when empathy is not mutual so that one's sense of self becomes confused in the relationship (see below).

⁸² Jordan, Empathy and Self Boundaries, 5.

⁸³ Jordan, Empathy and Self Boundaries, 8.

Finally, Jordan talks about the importance of self-empathy, the possibility for empathic responsiveness to our own inner states.

The motivational and attitudinal state of nonjudgment and openness, taking an experience seriously, readiness to experience affect and cognitive understanding may contribute to important shifts in the inner experience of troublesome self-images."⁴

More generally, self-empathy enhances self-awareness and understanding, leading to an expanded and clearer sense of self.

Disconnections and Violations

Many relational contexts do not provide opportunities for mutual connection, empathy and empowerment. Baker Miller describes the sense of disconnection which occurs when a person is prevented from participating in mutually responsive and mutually enhancing relationships. Minor disconnections can enhance a relationship when: (1) the person can take action within the relationship to represent her experience; and (2) the others in the relationship can respond in ways which lead to re-connection. Serious disconnections, on the other hand, result in a "confusing sense of disconnection and isolation."⁵ When disconnection becomes the primary mode of relating this has severe consequences. For example, in a disconnecting marital

⁴ Jordan, Empathy and Self Boundaries, 9.

⁵ Jean Baker Miller, Connections, Disconnections, 7.

relationship, a woman will often try to reconnect in any way possible, and will attempt to change herself into a person acceptable within the disconnecting relationship and so "move away from and redefine a large part of her experience --those parts of experience that she has determined are not allowed."⁸⁶ Over time she becomes confused about her feelings and her actions come less and less from her own experience in the relationship and more and more from what she believes she must be order to be allowed connection with significant others.

A disconnecting relational dynamic leads to disconnected selves who use others to fulfil their needs and who focus on control of self and other. This leads to a fear of relationality and a communication style based on lecture, blaming and abstraction. In contrast, the interconnecting dynamic of self-in-relation theory starts with the experience of connected selves whose intersubjective responsiveness leads to a trust and self-awareness which empowers each person to meet their needs mutually, thus leading to more connectedness as well as more defined and confident selves.⁸⁷

Self-in-relation theory provides a psychological description of the effects of non-mutual relationships,

⁸⁶ Jean Baker Miller, Connections, Disconnections, 8-9.

⁸⁷ See McNerney for a description of these different dynamics, 73-90.

those which Heyward suggests form the alienated power relations characteristic of our current communal social relations. Self-in-relation theory therefore helps us to understand how such relationships block the flow of erotic power and joyful interaction and how we can learn to relate in mutually empowering ways.

Critical Reflections

This chapter has argued that a feminist model of the self must be a relational model which understands self as emergent within relationship but which also clearly underlines the power and agency of individual women's selves. In evaluating both Keller's model of connective selfhood and self-in-relation theory for their adequacy as a psychological framework for a feminist therapeutic it is therefore important to look at how these two models suggest that individual integrity emerges within relational selfhood.

As described earlier, for the traditional separative ego of patriarchy the identity and continuity of the self is given by its boundaries which separate it from other selves. In rejecting this model Keller suggests that the integrity of the connective self is not given by its boundaries but through its centered acts of self-composition in which it receives the world into itself. In contrast to Keller, the integrity of the self in self-in-relation theory comes from the clarity and authenticity the self experiences in

mutually enhancing relationships--that is, the integrity of the self is found within the relationship rather than in an inner act of self-composition. This is an important difference which points to a critical difficulty in Keller's theory of the connective self--namely, its inability to articulate the types of relations between selves.

In Keller's analysis of the connective self, the relation fades away and the connective self ends up not feeling very connected--a subject creating in its own space and weaving its own story. Although that story is composed of other selves, we are left with the image of the solitary, individual weaver, rather than, for example, a community weaving a mutual society of selves together. In her desire to retain a clear subjectivity and a strong selfhood for women within a relational understanding, Keller loses some of the power of that very relational understanding. She implies that somehow what the self makes of its in-flowing self-moments and world depends on its own ability to synthesize a creative complexity from them, and thus loses the sense in which we mutually create possibilities for self and relation.

In self-in-relation theory, on the other hand, selves are mutually structured. The primary dynamic of development and creativity is in the relationship itself as active agency rather than in individual selves. The mature, well-integrated self is the self that can engage in mutually

enhancing connections, not the self that can integrate the widest connectivity. Self-creation occurs mutually in the relation, not in an individual moment of self-composition. The optimal development of each self depends upon mutually empathic and empowering connections with others selves which allow it to enter and sustain mutual relationship. Connectedness and selfhood are, therefore, social rather than individual tasks because we mutually create the possibilities and limits of our existence together. The self develops by coming more and more into its relational power to create, with other selves, mutually sustaining relationships in the concrete flesh-and-blood communities of our everyday lives. This means that the creation of self in relationship with others has an ethical dimension and this supports feminist liberation theologians' insight that we literally have the power to create or destroy one another in relationship."²

A related weakness of Keller's theory from the standpoint of feminist liberation theology, is the lack of an adequate social analysis of the way our current social relations are structured. Without this we have no insight into specific communal and political strategies for solidarity, resistance and change. Because Keller proposes the web as an ontological reality, it is easy to lose sight

² This is most clearly stated in Harrison, Making the Connections, 3-21.

of the fact that creating connections and weaving tapestries of mutual being are communal, social and historical tasks. Keller does emphasize that we start "from a broken web" and speaks of the feminist urgency to reconnect a fragmented world, however this reweaving seems to be primarily an individual rather than a communal task. And the vision and the task seem to float free from the physical and material reality of human interrelatedness."

The metaphor of web is itself problematic in that it implies a relational structure which is essentially similar throughout its entirety. This acts to mask the particular ways in which our interrelations are structured. Between nodes the only possibilities are connection or brokenness. This fails to suggest what the differing kinds and qualities of connectedness might be. There are more options than broken and unbroken webs. Moreover, connectedness on its own gives no way of understanding how the web itself is structured, where boundaries have been drawn to include or exclude, where snares have been set, and by whom, and how these larger structures affect our self-creation. As theologian Susan Thistlethwaite argues, our relational web is structured in complex ways to provide particular kinds of relations with particular dynamics. The web has been

" Susan Thistlethwaite makes a telling critique of feminist ontologies of connection and suggests that the white feminist quest for "connectivity--no matter what" can mask our own involvement in the violence that breaks and distorts the web. See Sex, Race and God, 87-89.

"deranged in complex patterns by race, sex and class."²⁰ Separation is too simplistic a picture of our current brokenness, because it fails to look at the particular dynamics that create and sustain separation and destructive relationships, and connection is too vague to help the movement toward a more fruitful connectedness which includes an understanding of difference and conflict.²¹

While the fundamental assumptions of self-in-relation theory include a commitment to a socially interactive view of human relationality it also lacks an adequate articulation of the broader social context within which human relationships are situated. Self-in-relation theory, as it is currently formulated, primarily focusses on one-on-one relationships, notably mother-daughter and therapist-client relationships. Surrey has, however, applied self-in-relation theory to a broader relational context in looking at mutually empowering relational dynamics in a

²⁰ Thistlethwaite, 71.

²¹ Thistlethwaite argues that process philosophy can be a benign face of patriarchy, perpetrating a dualism between the mental and the physical, the divine and the historic-economic-political order, under the disguise of relationality. Knowledge, creativity and change--in this case, the process of creative self-composition--are located in a mental process which still stands apart from the ongoing historical and material world. Thistlethwaite also suggests that process theory implies that we are responsible for what we make of ourselves. Our failure to grasp this freedom of self-creation is the individual's problem. Thistlethwaite asks "But concretely what might this mean for a battered woman? See Sex, Race and God, 88.

group setting."²² Much more can be done in this area as the concept of self-in-relation embraces a wider understanding of its relational context.

Feminist psychologist and therapist Harriet Goldhor Lerner critiques self-in-relation theory for its over-reliance on the mother-infant dyad as the primary locus for self-development, and for polarizing gender differences which "rest on implicit assumptions about the primacy of early mothering and the related belief that interactions with same-sex or cross-sex children will lead to different . . . developmental pathways."²³ Lerner's critique therefore also applies to the feminist approaches based on object relations theory discussed earlier. Lerner argues:

From a systemic perspective, the development of self or identity and the related capacity for empathic connectedness develop in the context of complex family processes, which are, in turn, given shape and form by the cultural context in which the family is embedded. . . . Relational capacities and the structure of the self reflect many interacting factors, including key family triangles, the relationship between the parents, the level of differentiation of each parent from his or her own family of origin, and each parent's capacity to form a close emotional bond to the child."²⁴

Lerner's critique is accurate in pointing to the lack of integration of a developed systemic perspective into self-in-relation theory. Lerner herself uses Murray Bowen's

²² Surrey, Relationship and Empowerment.

²³ Lerner, Women in Therapy, 276.

²⁴ Lerner, Women in Therapy, 273-74.

family systems theory as the basis of her approach to therapy. Reiterating many of the themes addressed in this chapter, she advocates the importance of remaining connected in relationship without reactivity, emphasizes the need for self-focus as a requirement for intimacy, and looks at the effects of generational patterns of relational dynamics on current relational competence."⁵

In addition to its lack of attention to broader family and social systems, self-in-relation theory has so far failed to address the importance of our relational connection to non-human creatures and to the environment in which we live. Author Joanna Macy, challenges us to experience selfhood in the context of our interrelatedness to the earth and the ongoing life process."⁶ Advocating a systems perspective where our particular consciousness is open to and interconnected with all of life, like a nerve cell in a neural net, Joanna Macy calls us to an experience of self-in-relation which she calls the "ecological self." The ecological sense of self is widened and deepened to encompass the self of tree, whale, homeless person and planet which become no longer "other" but intrinsic to the self's vitality. Macy argues that such a broad systemic

⁵ Harriet Goldhor Lerner, The Dance of Anger (New York: Harper and Row, 1985); The Dance of Intimacy (New York: Harper and Row, 1989); and Women in Therapy.

⁶ Joanna Macy, "The Greening of the Self," Common Boundary, July/August 1990, 22-25.

perspective is essential to our mutual survival and that when we begin to experience such a sense of self we experience a buoyancy and resilience which allows us to live with courage, endurance, ingenuity and profound pleasure in our interconnectedness.

Gestalt psychology offers an alternative psychological grounding to that of self-in-relation theory which addresses this ecological concern. It affirms a relational understanding while also making explicit the ecological dimensions of our interrelationality. Wanting to develop an approach to pastoral counseling which is responsive to our existence as earth creatures, and to our current conditions of personal, social and ecological brokenness, Linda Filippi has used transformative feminism and Gestalt psychology to explore the importance of our embodied existence and the centrality of place in orienting responsible human living.⁹⁷

Filippi points out that the concept of organism/environment field in Gestalt theory makes clear the radically relational nature of all existence and the impossibility of extracting the human self from the environment. Thus, unlike self-in-relation theory, Gestalt theory is not so easily restricted to one-on-one human relationships. The description of selves and relationships underlying Filippi's work offers additional insight for a model of relational selfhood.

⁹⁷ Filippi, Of Sweet Grapes.

Filippi explores the characteristics of Gestalt theory which provide an understanding of relational connectedness and brokenness. She describes how, within Gestalt theory, healthy functioning depends on the free-flowing movement of information and energy between self and environment which enables the organism to engage in healthy self-regulation. Such regulation depends on good contact with the environment and awareness of current experience. The "contact boundary" is where the relational activity of self takes place through sensing, feeling, touching and this is where self and other are defined and experienced.

Ideally, the flow of experience goes smoothly as we move toward and away from contact with differing aspects of our experiential field. Filippi goes on to describe how boundary disturbances can stop this flow so that contact becomes inadequate. Extreme boundary disturbances result either in isolation from contact, or in confluence, which prevent clear gestalt formation within the self. Introjections and projections of denied parts of the self also distort the perception of the present. The restoration of good contact depends on attentive awareness.

Filippi also points out that throughout Gestalt theory, dialogue and I-Thou encounter characterize relational interaction. Hence, the focus of therapy is to gain awareness of dysfunctional process and to restore attentive awareness in a dialogical context.

Using Gestalt therapy within a transformative feminist framework, Filippi weaves together a vision of "simple meeting"--embodied I-Thou encounter--in the context of place.

Places are complexes of relationships and interactions which define both context and self, allowing a person to know that she or he is of the earth. . . . Place is not an abstraction . . . for it points to the experience of being in relationship to the whole of creation through the specifics of place; it points to the experience of harmonious dwelling. Dwelling speaks to being fully alive, to deep encounter with the environment. Dwelling includes respecting, caring for, and preserving one's place and one's community."²

Filippi argues that the vision of simple meeting, where self, other and the presence of the holy are known in the flowing life energy of everyday encounters, offers the possibility of reconciliation and the transformation of violent and abusive relational interactions.

Filippi's development of Gestalt theory locates our relationality very concretely in the physical experiences of everyday life. In this regard it serves to emphasize the socio-historical context of relational selves as well as their physical embodiedness in the material conditions of our present world. It thus provides a useful corrective to the lack of emphasis on this point in both Keller's model and self-in-relation theory.

² Linda Filippi, "Place, Feminism and Healing: An Ecology of Pastoral Counseling," Journal of Pastoral Care 45, no. 3 (Fall 1991): 237.

Conclusions and Commonalities

The feminist search for a psychology which will affirm the power, strength and agency of women's selves as well as their relational existence has led to the rejection of models of autonomous, separative selves which act against healthy human relating. Separative and soluble styles of selfhood characterize the abusive and addictive relational dynamics of patriarchy and continue to sustain hierarchical modes of exerting power over others. The feminist search has concentrated on finding a relational model of selfhood --one which affirms the strength of selves in relationship with other selves and which points to the power that lies in mutual relational connection.

The relational models of selfhood offered by object relations theory, Keller's model of the connective self, and the Stone Center psychologists' model of self-in-relation all describe the ways in which selves emerge within, and are constituted by, their relational context.

Object relations theories show how the suppression of feeling and the distortion of the connective bond in infancy due to abuse, and to the processes of gender identity formation, produce selves out of touch with erotic power and ill-equipped to enter into mutual relation. Self-in-relation theorists focus on the nature of "growth-enhancing" relational encounters which are essential to creativity and cooperative endeavor. They show how violent

and disconnecting relational dynamics create fragmented, confused selves, out of touch with their own sensation and feelings, and lacking a strong sense of self and agency. In contrast, relationships of mutuality and empathy, which allow affective-cognitive meeting and mutual understanding, foster strong selves empowered to act in the world and able to experience joy in living.

Keller's model of the connective self offers a theoretical basis for understanding the multiplicity of the self and the constructive nature of selving within a relational context. Self-in-relation theory, however, offers a more adequate description of the integrity of a relational self and locates such integrity in the mutual structuring of selves and the emergence of self-clarity and integrity within mutual interaction. Both Keller's theory and self-in-relation theory need to be extended to more adequately represent the social structuring of relational networks and the material, embodied context of our communal relational lives. Systems and Gestalt approaches suggest ways in which to integrate these concerns into a more adequate model of self in relationship.

The common themes which emerge from this discussion are that: a strong sense of self depends upon the awareness of the self's feeling-experience and its expression and validation in relationship; the boundaries of the self need to be fluid so that selves can connect empathically through

these boundaries; non-mutual and abusive relationship based on coercion and control fragment our connectedness with one another and lead to diffuse, fragmented and confused selves; the way toward transformation lies in becoming aware of, acknowledging, and expressing our emotions, needs and wants, in mutually empathic relational contexts; and such mutual connections generate creativity and power.

CHAPTER 4

The Centering Self

In the previous two chapters, theologies of erotic power and psychologies of relational selves were examined within the context of the feminist commitment to the empowerment of women's selves and the creation of just relationships. This chapter develops a model of a "centering self" which describes a vision of relational selves in a theological context of erotic power.

The model of a centering self to be described in this chapter integrates the insights about self and relationship from the discussion of the two previous chapters. Chapter 2 concluded that the kinds of selves envisioned by a feminist liberation theology of erotic power are sensual, feeling, body selves who are connected to their own feelings, thoughts and needs and in touch with the world of interrelationship within which they live. Erotic selves are empowered selves and moral agents who act in community with other selves to create relationships of mutuality and justice. Relationships among selves are characterized by the flowering or suppression of erotic power, depending on whether those relationships are characterised by the alienating power of dominance and control or by mutuality,

openness, solidarity and friendship.

Chapter 3 concluded that the concept of human selves as separate, bounded substances externally related to one another, where individual needs get met through the use of others, is inadequate and destructive to healthy human relating. Understanding human selves as emergent within and constituted by their relational context, points to the crucial role of that relational context in the emergence of healthy selves. Non-mutual, non-empathic relationships based on control and coercion fragment selves and relationship and, since a strong sense of self depends upon the awareness of feeling and its expression and validation in relationship, mutual and empathic relationship are essential for healing and growth.

It is clear that the view of human selves upheld by theologies of erotic power share some important points of connection with psychologies of relational selves, most notably in their emphasis on the importance of our sensual, feeling existence and the emergence of identity, power and creativity within relationship. The model of a centering self to be described here, explicitly integrates these approaches to provide both theological and psychological insight for therapeutic practice.

Self as Center

The theme of center can be found within the literature discussed so far; however, it has not become a focus for

theoretical analysis. I have chosen the concept of center to focus my own theoretical understanding and therapeutic practice because I believe that the image of center is useful in describing a strong, rooted awareness of identity, purpose and action while also allowing for an understanding of relationality and spirituality.

The concept of center directly addresses the question raised in the last chapter: How can strong, integral selves emerge from a relational model of selfhood? It has been pointed out that within traditional ego psychologies the strength and integrity of the self is given by its boundaries, which allow it to distinguish self from other and to act over and against other bounded selves. Yet such boundedness in fact leads away from strength and integrity since a rigidly bounded self denies its own interrelatedness and so cuts itself off from mutually nurturing interactions. It then has to meet its needs through coercion and control and is consequently always afraid of not having its needs met.

In contrast to ego psychologies, relational selves are described, by both Keller and self-in-relation theory, as having fluid, permeable boundaries where the self emerges in mutual interaction when the boundaries of self and other overlap. Where does the integrity of the self lie in these relational understandings? It was argued that, for Keller, the integrity of the self is given through its unique acts

of self-composition from its unique spatio-temporal perspective and its subsequent creative influence within the interrelated web. For self-in-relation theory, the integrity of the self is given by the clarity and authenticity of self-awareness that emerges within a mutual, empathic, relational interaction.

Building on these models I use the image of center to name the self's integrity and locus of action within a relational model of selfhood. The use of center as a model for self allows for a strong sense of identity and agency while also allowing for a relational understanding. The identity and integrity of the self is given through its center while its connectedness is experienced through its boundaries. Center also becomes the locus for spiritual connectedness with others and with God.

The model of centering selves in relationship also addresses some of the concerns raised at the end of the last chapter about the articulation of material embeddedness, difference, and social context within a relational model of selfhood.

A Center of Power Within Ourselves

Within a patriarchal context, women's selves tend to be centered outside of themselves. As Susan Dunfee states:

To see ourselves as a reflection in others' eyes
is what women do when we seek to please others
. . . we then become objects even in our own eyes
and thus lose our subjectivity, our center of

awareness and agency.¹

Reclaiming our own subjectivity then becomes essential to women's journey toward liberation. The discovery of a center within ourselves "from which to define, create, decide, and integrate our experience"² allows us to experience ourselves as subjects and agents with the power to name and speak the reality of our lives and act with power to create and define that reality.

Whereas patriarchal bondage means for women that we are named from without and begin indeed to see ourselves as reflected in the eyes of patriarchy, the process of liberation is one in which a woman comes to awareness. That is, she sees with her own eyes, from her own center of being. . . . This awareness reflects a discovery of a new center within.³

The discovery of a new center allows selves to experience themselves as subjects and agents and also as moral agents responsible for their choices and actions. Dunfee suggests that the confusion of self Carol Gilligan observed in young adolescent women reflects a loss of centeredness, where the conflict between being attentive to self and attentive to others results in the submergence of the "I." The shift out of this confusion involves a change in the locus of women's perception and judgment. Rather than judging their actions in terms of their externally

¹ Dunfee, Beyond Servanthood, 95.

² Dunfee, Beyond Servanthood, 25-26.

³ Dunfee, Beyond Servanthood, 21.

defined goodness--that is, how they will look in the eyes of others--the locus of perception and judgment shifts to within the self, and ethical judgments are now made "in attentiveness to the woman's own voice and to her new awareness, . . . from a new center."⁴ The meaning of responsibility shifts from unquestioned responding to other's needs or expectations to making choices to act from one's own center and then being responsible for those actions. This "moves a woman from confusion--the confusion in which her self, her voice is lost--to integrity--an integrity that untangles and reweaves the confusion of voices that form her reality."⁵

Mature moral agency requires, then, the experience of a centered self and is characterized by an ethic of caring which includes the self--which, in fact, requires self centeredness. Dunfee argues that, for feminist theology, the Christian ethic of love no longer requires the sacrifice of the self but now requires that we take responsibility for our freedom and authority, as we are called forth from our own center, to act as one among a community of friends in befriending the world. The responsibility of such caring requires a centered awareness, honesty, and the willingness to participate by speaking with one's own voice. Thus, Dunfee argues, "the call to freedom offered by Jesus is the

⁴ Dunfee, Beyond Servanthood, 95.

⁵ Dunfee, Beyond Servanthood, 96.

call to live from one's own center and with an integrity that can engage the world and re-order it in a better way."⁶ Rita Brock makes a similar observation. When our faith is centered in external models, for example that of Jesus:

The question a Christian must ask is, "What would Jesus do or have me do in this situation?" Such a question leads the focus of feeling and action away from self-awareness, away from our inner selves, our contexts, and our history because we are not compelled to ask "how do I feel right now, how are others feeling, and what can I do to lessen all our pain and suffering in this context?"⁷

The first question locates love and action in a reality external to ourselves, the second moves us toward our own centers. It moves "toward heart--toward self-possession, profound relationality, and the emergence of creative caring."⁸

In summary, the emergence of mature moral agency resides in the experience of oneself as a center of awareness empowered to engage the world as a center of creativity and action. The centering self is one who knows herself as subject and agent, one who affirms and speaks her own experience, feels empowered to act in her world, alone and in community, and to make ethical judgments about those

⁶ Dunfee, Beyond Servanthood, 143.

⁷ Brock, xiv.

⁸ Brock, xiv.

actions from her own center.'

The centering self we have described so far is defined as a locus of awareness and action rather than as a bounded entity. The focus is, therefore, on a process of selving rather than on a fixed structure. The self is formed not as a structure distinct from other selves but rather through a continually changing process of "self-centering." As Dunfee points out, "This process of centering is not the same as the self-centered one . . . where the centering self fortifies itself behind walls built in its vicious circling around itself."¹⁰ Rather, the process of self-centering is "the activity of hearing all voices including her own, and then integrating them and responding with her own decision in her own voice."¹¹ It is this process of selving, of self-centering, which is crucial to the development and empowerment of women's selves. It is a process which does not cut women off from relationship but weaves them into relationship in their own unique ways.

A Multiple Integrity

In line with the above argument, Mary Daly argues that

' Beverly Harrison's outstanding work in social ethics consistently affirms the moral agency of women. She shows how much of the abortion debate refuses to acknowledge women as moral agents capable of making their own ethical judgments and decisions. See Harrison, Our Right to Choose: Toward a New Ethic of Abortion (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983).

¹⁰ Dunfee, Beyond Servanthood, 95.

¹¹ Dunfee, Beyond Servanthood, 95.

the process of liberation for women involves the shedding of the false selves offered by patriarchy and the discovery "that there is an essential integrity at the very core of her Self."¹² For Daly, the integrity of the core "One Self" gives each woman a strong individuality and manifests itself in a radical consistency of behavior which enables her to act with power and presence. Catherine Keller appreciates the way "Daly's language inspires that empowering oneness of purpose that women often still lack."¹³ She argues, however, that Daly's emphasis on the unity of the self, that there is "One Self" found at the center of a woman's being, is misguided because it suggests an inner essence or core, a separate selfhood which although it affirms the strength of women's selves does so at the expense of our interrelatedness. Keller's argument is that this necessarily ends up supporting matricidal and, hence, misogynist relational structures. She argues that, rather than "One Self," a multiple concept of selfhood is essential for the creativity and radical consistency that Daly requires of women's selves. It is precisely the difference between momentary selves and the impact of other's selves that allows the past to remain open to the present decision of self-creation and empowered action. Moreover, a multiple concept of selfhood is more reflective of our experience of

¹² Daly, Gyn/Ecology, 382.

¹³ Keller, 210.

the many differing aspects of our selves and the different selves we are in different relational contexts.¹⁴

Keller's argument points to the danger of describing self as center. Can the vision of a centered self be reconciled with the relational selfhood for which we have argued? I believe that it can and, moreover, that the concept of self as center is essential for a connective or relational self to be strong enough to provide the integrity and empowerment needed by a feminist self. However, as we have already noted, that center must be an integrating locus of awareness and action rather than bounded entity or unchanging essence.

Within Keller's own model, the self is uniquely present at the moment's subjective center, even though it is composed from many other selves--both previous self-moments and the other actual beings who have become part of the self. Her connective self can, therefore, be considered to have a center--a center of awareness and creativity and a center of self-composition. It is a momentary center and yet it holds the multiple self together, creating an integrity and consistency in the relational flux. When the center holds we are prevented from fragmentation and dissolution, we exist as creative, self-centering nodes in an ever-shifting web of relation responding to others and

¹⁴ Implications of the concept of multiple selfhood are currently being explored within feminist philosophy. See Garry and Pearsall.

spinning our own strands of connection and influence. It is the continuing process of self-centering, of finding a center within, that gives a oneness, an integrity, to the myriad sensations, feelings, thoughts, intentions, and imaginings of our experience, and which gives a purpose and consistency to our choices, actions and behaviors.

Keller herself is reluctant to ascribe a center to the connective self because she believes it too easily suggests some kind of permanent essence. She does suggest, however, that if the feminist self needs a center or core, then it must be a soft core--a heart. She argues that although women need to strengthen their hearts they must not harden them. Therefore, the center cannot be "the insulated inner essence of a hard-core selfhood."¹⁵ Rather than a fixed point, a point where we get fixated, the center is a rhythmical continuity which carries the past into the future. "The innermost psyche is the most fluid, volatile and dynamic place within us."¹⁶ Keller suggests as an image of such a center, the lava at the core of the earth, or sap rising in a tree, and contrasts this to an image of an apricot pit. I would add to these images of a center for the connective self that of a center of gravity. A center of gravity has no fixed point and shifts according to the momentary composition of its variously weighted components.

¹⁵ Keller, 212.

¹⁶ Keller, 213.

The center can be felt, however, and it is this center from which integrated, graceful and directed movement occurs. The center provides unity through its continuing process of integrating awareness and initiating action.

The Sacred Heart

Interestingly, it is the dynamic, innermost center of the connective self where Catherine Keller suggests we experience the divine.

Centering . . . we draw upon a peacefulness beyond the turbulence and treachery of particular relationships, particular obsessions and anxieties. But it is a stillness born of a greater width of connection and a livelier attunement to being here now, from my body's presence to its surrounding cosmos. The calm distills itself from the subtle bustle of things in process. Getting centered, we feel the sudden warmth of the deeper desire. . . . A desire that leads us beyond ourselves.¹⁷

At our center, "the molten core of our heart's desire," we meet the divine Eros, the living urge to relation.¹⁸ There "I encounter a Self that is at once most intimately my own and holy--but not wholly--Other."¹⁹ Thus the centering self takes us to the divine, to the erotic power of life and relationship and its source within us.

Daly also locates our relation to the divine through our centering Self. She argues that the source of all power/being is experienced deep within, and that through

¹⁷ Keller, 213.

¹⁸ Keller, 215.

¹⁹ Keller, 213.

turning to one's own center and the reality experienced there, we affirm our own being--"I am." Thus we experience the power of being, itself--a power in which we participate, a deeper source which empowers our lives in their creative unfolding and which is the incarnation of divine presence.²⁰

Rita Brock's erotic theologizing plays with the image of heart (an image of center) as a metaphor for the human self and our capacity for intimacy which is also the locus of our experience of the erotic power of God.

Heart is the center, innermost region, and most real, vital meaning and core of our lives. . . . The union of physical, emotional, and spiritual suggests itself in the very word heart, which also is the physical center of our bodies, their vital source.²¹

Heart, the center of all vital functions, is the seat of self, of energy, of loving, of compassion, of conscience, of tenderness, and of courage--the Latin cor means heart. To take heart is to gain courage. Our lives bloom in fullness from the heart, the core of our being, which is created and sustained by interconnection.²²

In Brock's vision, heart is the center of our being where we know our own experience and open ourselves to connection with our world and one another; here we touch and move one another; and in the connection of heart to heart we experience intimacy and the flowering of erotic power. "Erotic power is incarnate in heart. It binds the life-

²⁰ See Dunfee, Beyond Servanthood, 23.

²¹ Brock xiv.

²² Brock, xiv.

giving, healing heart of ourselves with each other, if we possess the courage to claim it."²³ Thus, Brock argues, our mutual connections at the level of heart open avenues for divine power to create good among us,²⁴ and our heartstrength is a centered energy that radiates outward to touch the heart of others giving and receiving love.

The concept of center thus joins together a psychology of selves and a theology of erotic power. As we live from our own centers we experience ourselves as subjects and agents open to the flowing of erotic power within us, through our connectedness to life and relation to others. Uncentered, we live at the periphery, living from the outside-in rather than the inside-out, objectifying ourselves as reflections of the external world; fragmented and confused, we lose touch with our own experience, power and agency and are cut off from one another. Uncentered, we lose touch with the divine possibilities of relationship and intimacy and consequently with the mystery and power of life itself.

The spirituality of the centering self is the process of centering--remaining present to one's experience--a practice common to many spiritual disciplines. Centering ourselves, we experience our subjective reality with its

²³ Brock, 45.

²⁴ Brock relates this idea to Henry Nelson Wieman's thought. Brock, 47-48.

ever-changing complexity of feelings, thoughts, images, sensations and desires. Focussing our awareness inward, we encounter the intensity of our feelings, and holding them all together we can come to some kind of integration where clarity emerges. We find a center in which to rest. As we deepen our centering awareness we find the place of connection deep within us where we can open ourselves to a wider experience of connection and empowerment. We are then challenged to engage with others acting and speaking from our center, listening and loving from heart to heart.

My own experience of this process comes from my participation in Quaker worship. Sitting in the silence of the worshipping group I am aware of the fleeting thought, feelings and sensation that make up my consciousness. Moving my attention deeper within I find a place of inner calm as I rest within the communal silence which at times feels like a palpable, living and loving presence. I feel myself opening in attentive awareness and feel my connectedness to the group, which Friends say is now "gathered." In that attentive, vibrant space the voice of another may speak words that resonate deeply, that spark a train of thoughts, images and insights that clarify my thoughts and move me deeply. My own thoughts and feelings may coalesce into words which rise within me and push to be expressed. Standing, I speak the words rising from my center into the attentive silence. As the meeting continues

clarity may emerge about actions I need to carry out--
 leadings--and I find the willingness and energy to commit
 myself to them. The rhythm of silence and speaking
 continues until we shake hands around the circle with open
 eyes and hearts.

In my own life, Quaker spirituality has been a profound
 experience of centering: one which clarifies my inner
 turmoil, integrates its complexity and deepens its meaning;
 one which opens my heart to release frozen emotions; one
 which enables me to feel life and compassion rising within
 me; and one which empowers me to speak and act with
 integrity from my own center. The process not only takes
 place during official times of worship but ideally
 characterizes a mode of being in relationship which can be
 practiced at all times within differing relational contexts.

Historically, the spiritual experience of women
 ministers within the Quaker community allowed them, through
 its centering practice, to act with power and presence as
 centered selves and agents of personal and social
 transformation despite the social forces and practices of
 their time which encouraged passivity and subordination.²⁵
 Quaker spirituality still provides today a way for women to
 discover themselves as living centers of awareness and
 initiative with the creative power to shape their relational

²⁵ Maureen Graham, Women of Power and Presence: The
 Spiritual Formation of Four Quaker Women Ministers
 (Wallingford, Pa.: Pendle Hill Publications, 1990).

world.

The spirituality of the centering self consists then of a deepening and an opening. As Brock suggests, religious life is to be lived in receptivity toward the depth of our lived experience "in the realm of imaginative open interaction with the world."²⁶ We are not called to dependence on a power outside ourselves but to an exploration of the depths of our most inner personal selves where we find our connectedness to all of life. We are called to the discovery of the life and power at our center and to the opening of ourselves to each other at this level.

Our Bodies, Our Selves

To summarize the discussion to this point: the image of self as center has been used to describe the integrity and initiative of the self within a relational model of selfhood. The image that emerges is of a self with a dynamic, integrating center where the depth and breadth of sensations, feelings, thoughts and desires are experienced and integrated. Thus the centering self is first a center of awareness. Through awareness of what is happening at her center, the centering self comes to know her self. The dynamic, flowing, centering self finds clarity and meaning in the midst of her varied experiencing and infuses her actions with a oneness of purpose. Aware of her own experience the centering self is empowered to speak and to

²⁶ Brock, 47.

act with her own voice, integrating awareness with creative initiative. Thus, the centering self is a center of creative agency as well as a center of awareness. Her mode of agency is one of creative power and relational presence to herself and others. Finally, I have suggested that the centering self touches the sacred energy at the heart of life. Opening self in connectedness to others allows erotic power to flow in the creativity and empowerment of mutual interaction.

Bodies and Selves

Part of what has been missing from the analysis so far has been the acknowledgment that it is through our bodies that we are connected to the world. Our bodies mediate and support all feeling, thought and action. Through sensations, perceptions, breathing, eating, moving toward and away, holding, comforting, pleasuring, playing, our bodies mediate our relationships to each other and to the physical world. As Rita Brock argues, "bodies are our first, closest and most powerful connection to both ourselves and all else."²⁷ As described in Chapter 2, the power of a theology of erotic power lies in its assertion that divine power is rooted in our sensual, affective existence. Our bodies, needs, instincts, feelings and passions characterize our existence as spiritual and moral beings. Such a theology counters the tendency of

²⁷ Brock, 21.

patriarchal theologies to split spirit and matter, mind and body, and to consider the former "higher," purer, or more godly.

Centering selves are, therefore, feeling-body selves. As centers of awareness they are aware of their bodily experiences, they are at home in their bodies. In Keller's poetic words: "From iridescent surface sensations to those profound emotions experienced in the heart, gut or groin, personhood is thoroughly enfleshed."²⁸ It is our bodies that participate in the world, they are our special corner of the cosmos where we feel and act. To be a centering self requires that we be aware of our body sensations, inner feelings and thoughts so that none are split off from our integrating center. Such awareness gives us an affirmation that we are, that we are alive, that we are in connection, and that we have power to move, to act, and to move others.

William James underscored the importance of our bodies to our sense of personal identity: "the body is the storm-center, the origin of co-ordinates, the constant place of stress in that experience-train."²⁹ Keller believes that James leans "too heavily on raw physiology to provide stability among the flux" and she looks to the self's unique acts of self-composition and creativity as the locus of its

²⁸ Keller, 234.

²⁹ William James, A Pluralistic Universe (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1909), 380.

unity and stability. Here, Keller downplays the centrality of our bodily experience to our sense of self.³⁰ Our existence as bodies is crucially important to our sense of centeredness as a self differentiated in relation to and with other selves. Our bodies give us a location and an experience of continuity within our changing experiential world. To know that I am a self is to know that I am a body in this particular place, here and now, having this experience.

Our bodies thus locate our spatio-temporal perspective in life. They give us a powerful sense of center--of where we are. As we move physically in the world we are aware of the shifting center of gravity which gives us balance and without which we cannot move coherently. In dancing and athletics we can know, and feel, the difference between centered and uncentered movement. Bodies also provide us with a sense of boundedness. Our bodies are bounded by our skin yet our bodies are permeable; sensations and perception pass through into our consciousness; emotions, thoughts,

³⁰ As white feminists, despite our assertions to the contrary, we are too prone to dismiss the material as a locus of meaning and replace it with the archetypal or metaphysical, so that bodies fade out of our theories and we lose touch with the physicality of life. See Naomi Goldenberg, "Archetypal Theory and the Separation of Mind and Body." I would agree with Keller that there can be no simple identity between body and self/soul. She argues that self is irreducible to soul or body: it is body ensouled and soul embodied; they are always together but not the same. The soul is the streaming of selves which compose themselves out of the field of dynamic energy and knowledge that is our body. See Keller, 233-40.

desires and imaginings arise within us and flow out from us through our actions or speech. Our bodies are in constantly changing relational contact with our world.

Our bodies also carry many socio-cultural meanings and implications which shape our experience of self and define particular relational possibilities. Sex, race and physical deformation or disability are the most obvious in this regard. But the relational implications of class and sexual preference also have body-associated cultural meanings. Our bodies are often the locus of oppression and violation within the coercive power of patriarchy where control of other's bodies and control of one's own body become avenues to power and evidence of maturity. Such control acts against self-centering awareness and open mutual exploration of sensation, feeling and bodily difference.

The centering of the self includes the integration of thoughts, feelings and body sensations. When these are disconnected from one another the self loses clarity and integrity. Both object relations theorists and Daniel Stern argue that the integration of bodily sensation and feeling is essential to the development of the self. Object relations theory argues that the self's capacities to feel its physical, emotional and sensory needs, to make these needs known, and to receive its relational world through the body's senses and feelings, are the basis of its sense of self. As Stern documents, the differing sensations which

accompany self and other-initiated actions provide the experience of physical cohesion and agency crucial to the development of a core self. Those who lack a sense of self, or whose selves are fragmented, tend to lack awareness of their bodies, disturbances in body-image accompany varied psychological problems, and bodily violation creates profound emotional and relational consequences including dissociation between mind, body, and feeling. Our bodies are, then, crucial to the integrity of our selves.

Bodies are crucial to self-esteem as well as integrity. One of the most widespread manifestations of women's living from the "outside-in," rather than from a center within themselves, is in relation to their own bodies.³¹ Constantly subject to patriarchal images and commands about the ideal appearance of the female body, and trained to live daily adjusting the image seen in a mirror, it can be hard for women to experience any internal sense of their bodies apart from their external image. Consequently women continue to show widespread concern about appearance and weight despite feminist critiques. A pilot study by the Stone Center showed that while 22 percent of their interviewed college students could have been considered to

³¹ The distinction between "outside-in" and "inside-out" in relation to feminist psychology appears in Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orbach, Outside In . . . Inside Out: Women's Psychology, A Feminist Psychoanalytic Approach (New York: Penguin, 1982); and Margo Adair Working Inside Out: Tools for Change (Berkeley: Wingbow Press, 1984).

have a weight problem or eating disorder of some sort, 72 percent experienced "moderate-to-extreme concern" about their weight despite the fact that the majority of these were no more than 10 pounds away from their ideal weight.³² Over a third of these young women were "always or almost always preoccupied with controlling their eating," while a quarter felt that their "present weight negatively affected their self-image to a large degree."³³ Such statistics represent an appalling diffusion of energy, agency and erotic power in the effort to respond to external expectations.

As women, our constant critical awareness of our bodies leads us away from knowing the erotic power that can arise within and between us as we enjoy the sensuality of our living bodies. We are unable to enjoy the deep sensations and feelings of our bodies moving in sunlight, running exuberantly, or dancing gracefully, when we see our bodies from the outside-in, rather than feel them from the inside-out--from the center of our being. The sexual ideology of our current society, exemplified in pornography, also takes us away from the deep sensations and emotions of our bodies and encourages us to experience our sexuality from the "outside-in," disconnected from each other as living sensual

³² Janet Surrey, Eating Patterns as a Reflection of Women's Development, Work in Progress, no. 15 (Wellesley: Stone Center, Wellesley College, 1984).

³³ Surrey, Eating Patterns, 2-3.

subjects. The pornographic, which denies spirit and objectifies the body, is the ultimate distortion of the erotic.³⁴

Sensing and Feeling

Locating a sense of self and relationship in our bodies' sensual awareness is part of the feminist project of reclaiming sensuality and emotions as sources of both knowledge and power. The epistemological focus on feeling within feminist thinking is, however, not naive. Emotions in themselves can be inappropriate, falsely constructed and debilitating. Within a patriarchal setting women have been defined as emotional and given the privilege of carrying society's emotional life (with the exception of its anger). Mary Daly names the "plastic passions"--free-floating feelings seemingly unrelated to relational events, such as anxiety, guilt, depression, resentment, cheeriness--and the "potted passions"--emotions which have been stunted and contained within acceptable channels, such as romantic love, distaste, irritation, squeamishness. She distinguishes them from "primary passions," or genuine "e-motions," which arise from our centered selves with the knowledge and the power to move us into engagement and transformation.³⁵

³⁴ See Griffin, Pornography and Silence; and Maureen Graham, "Sexuality and Spirituality: The Dance of Life," in Sexual Ethics: Some Quaker Perspectives, eds. W. Cooper and B. Fraser, (Greensboro, N.C.: Quaker Theological Discussion Group, 1990).

³⁵ Daly, Pure Lust.

Emotions arise in our relational interactions and are a sign of our connectedness. Both the experience and expression of emotion are relational events which communicate meaning about our relational environment. Emotions accompany our continuing, changing engagement with our relational world; like weather they move in and out of our experience, flowing through us, telling us about the climate. Emotions are, therefore, messengers--angels--sources of power with the capacity to move us and others.³⁶ However, as Keller states it, "emotions are not absolutes requiring obedience"³⁷--they are not out of our control, nor do we need to express them reactively. We may get stuck within an emotion refusing to let it move us, or to let it move through us, to change our selves and relationships, but if we can integrate our changing, vital, emotional experience we can learn to receive the vitality and meaning of their message without becoming possessed by them and they can empower us to act in relationship. Thus, as Sarah Hoagland argues, we are agents of our emotions. The expression of emotion can be abusive and manipulative in one setting, mutually empowering in another, and we are

³⁶ See Keller's discussion of Adrienne Rich's metaphor of anger and tenderness as "angels not polarities" in Keller, 226-27.

³⁷ Keller, 227.

responsible for the agency of our emotions."³⁸

The feminist emphasis on feeling does not suggest that women give up the power of their reasoning capacities, particularly since they have been excluded for so long from the power of the mind. Rather, they are led to discover the depth and the creative and political power that emerges in the mutual interrelation of feeling and thought. Reason and feeling cannot be separated any more than mind and body. As Sarah Hoagland puts it, "reasoning is part of the substance, direction, and perspective of emotions just as emotions are part of the texture, substance, and quality of reasoning."³⁹ It is in the severance, the disconnection, between reason and emotion and the subsequent silencing of emotion as irrational, that the destructive effects of patriarchal epistemology lie.⁴⁰ Moreover, feelings are not private, isolated events restricted to inner psychological space. They arise in a relational context and provide ways of perceiving which have relational consequences. As Hoagland argues, feelings are thus open to communal challenge in that

³⁸ Sarah Lucia Hoagland, Lesbian Ethics: Toward New Value (Palo Alto, Calif.: Institute of Lesbian Studies, 1988), 161-95.

³⁹ Hoagland, 186.

⁴⁰ While still polarizing feeling and thinking to some extent, Jung names them both as rational functions. He contrasts both feeling and thinking with sensation and intuition which he sees as direct, unmediated forms of awareness. See Jung: Selected Writings, ed. Anthony Storr (London: Fontana, 1983), 130-46.

they may rest on mistaken evaluations, be out of context, or may be being expressed in ways destructive to self or others.⁴¹ Keeping our emotions connected to our reasoning and judgment clarifies what is happening in our relational world, deepens the meaning and complexity of our feelings, and enables us to use the power of our emotions in ways which are practically effective and relationally respectful.

Self-in-relation theorists reflect their feminist commitment to the integration of feeling and thought by using the term feeling-thought to speak about our conscious awareness. And in their description of empathy they point to the fact that empathic mutuality has both cognitive and affective dimensions which are active simultaneously. It is through the connecting of feeling and thought (and working with the tensions and conflicts this may reveal) in relational interactions where self and other(s) participate in an experience of mutual understanding-feeling, that self-clarity, authentic expression and deepening relational connection emerge. We experience a certainty, a sense of truth which says, "Yes, that's right," when we identify our feelings and connect them with what is happening in our relational world. Building walls between feeling and reasoning, mind and body, confuses, fragments and paralyzes the self. Thus self-in-relation theory holds up a vision of interrelationality within as well as between selves. An

⁴¹ Hoagland, 193.

empathic connectedness of feelings, thoughts and sensations clarifies and defines us as centered selves with a coherent internal world meaningfully related to its relational context.

It is not just our feeling selves that are demeaned in a patriarchal ideology; other part of our selves, such as our sensing, imagination, dreaming, intuition and humor, are also devalued. From the richness of our internal experience which is continually changing with its changing relational context, we find a center from which come personal and communal empowerment and a deepened participation in the unfolding of our relational life. "It is the flow of energy and understanding back and forth among us that centers, transforms, and gives back again, that creates meaning."⁴²

An emphasis on our sensual, feeling selves, the erotic ground of our being also serves as a welcome reminder that our interrelationality as human beings is not restricted to our connection with other humans. It is not just in human relationships that we sense our connectedness. Our bodily experience tells us about our relational connection to the non-human physical world, from the stirrings of hunger to awe at the world's beauty. To feel our hearts beating, the blood rising, the heat of the sun, and the softness of our skin, is to know a connection to all of life--to the "whole

⁴² Hoagland, 197.

and compassionate being"⁴³ in its myriad manifestations. We feel the flowing of erotic power within our own body-selves, between our body-selves and other earth creatures, and between our body-selves and the air, fire, water and earth of our planet home. The deadening of such sensing and feeling disconnects us from the knowledge of our profound interrelatedness.

When we find ourselves uncentered, confused and stuck, paying attention to our bodies is a powerful way of finding our center once again. Focussing on our breathing allows us to attend to our sensations and feelings. Simple movement, a massage from a friend, or a walk in the woods, can lead us back to the awareness of the life moving within us, of our interrelationship with our surroundings, and of our presence here/now as living centers of being and becoming. Our bodies lead us to our centers; they are the "home of the heart."⁴⁴

Integrating the Self

The analysis thus far has described the process of self-centering--finding a center of cohesion and integrity amidst the everchanging complexity of our conscious experience--a process which brings into focus a clarity of awareness and enables us to act with a clarity of purpose.

⁴³ See Susan Griffin, "The Way of All Ideology," in Signs 7, no. 3 (Spring 1982): 641-60.

⁴⁴ Brock, 21.

The psychotherapeutic approach named psychosynthesis by its creator Roberto Assagioli describes a process of integration similar to that required by a centering self.⁴⁵ This model of the self, and the techniques psychosynthesis therapists have developed for its use, can, I believe, be very helpful for a feminist psychotherapeutic despite the need to radically revision the relational and theological framework within which this model of self is located.

The process of psychosynthesis involves the integration of the differing contents of consciousness--given through the functions of feeling, thinking, sensation, intuition, desire, imagination and will--around a self, or center, of awareness and initiative. Psychosynthesis describes the individual psyche as a living energy system--an organized system of energetic processes, or energy field, with a permeable membrane and an organizing center which is the self. The self is the actively integrating center of consciousness creating meaning and purpose from "the incessant flow of sensations, images, thoughts, feelings, desires and impulses, which we can observe, analyze and

⁴⁵ Assagioli was a universalist and a mystic who studied with Freud and Jung and was later influenced by Maslow. He critiqued psychoanalytic theory for failing to describe how the positive possibilities of human living--creativity, compassion, wisdom--develop and can be nurtured. He emphasized our human ability to act and shape our inner and outer worlds. His "psychosynthesis" reflects a process which he believed helps people to move toward a more humane communal existence. See Assagioli, Psychosynthesis: A Manual of Principles and Techniques (New York: Viking Press, 1971); and The Act of Will (New York: Penguin, 1974).

judge."⁴⁶ Conscious awareness rests within a psychic environment which is mostly unconscious and includes unconscious physical, emotional, imaginative and mental activities, and which is permeable to the collective unconscious--that is, the collective influences of the living community of which the self is a part.⁴⁷

The organized energy system which makes up our psyche has been structured by our past experience within personal relationships, social groups and institutional systems, and we continue to live and act in these energy fields. The conscious and unconscious influences, habits and patterns, past and present, which form our experience, and which psychosynthesis names complexes and sub-personalities, reflect the ways our psyche has been structured by past and present experiences both positive and negative. The process of psychosynthesis aims to move us toward a more effective, empowered and joyful way of living where we can relate to each other with compassion and creativity. This involves freeing up the energy depleted in inner conflict and complexes and integrating the psyche around the self--that is, discovering a center within ourselves which can

⁴⁶ Assagioli, Psychosynthesis, 18.

⁴⁷ In my thinking, and in psychosynthesis, the unconscious is not an ontological reality but merely a way of conceptualizing the elements and forces which influence our experience and behavior and of which we are currently unaware. See Assagioli, Jung and Psychosynthesis, (Pasadena, Calif.: Psychosynthesis Training Center, 1983), 8.

integrate the differing aspects of our experience into a coherent whole and use the energy of these psychic contents to act effectively in the world.

A key exercise in the psychosynthesis process is the exercise of dis-identification, which leads the self to stop identifying with the contents of consciousness--those shifting sensations, thoughts, feelings and desires that make up our normal conscious experience--and instead to become aware of the "I" that is experiencing them. This exercise encourages the experience of the self as a center within the flux of conscious awareness. It also encourages awareness of the contents of consciousness without our identity being determined by any one of them. The effect of such a practice, which has similarities with various forms of meditation, is to create an inner subjective space where the centered self becomes aware of the complexity of its ongoing experience.

The process of personal psychosynthesis proceeds with a careful exploration of this inner space. This process includes a general exploration of the unconscious, bringing complexes and emotionally-charged issues to light. Psychosynthesis also involves getting to know, experience and use all our different functions: thinking, feeling, sensation, intuition, imagination, desire and will. As we become aware of what we are experiencing in all these dimensions we come to know the richness of our inner world.

We discover thoughts and feelings we had shut out of consciousness. We start to identify sub-personalities, or inner voices, relatively enduring patterns within our consciousness which can seem to have a life of their own. These are well-developed complexes of feelings, thoughts, images, desires, which center around a particular experience or relational dynamic. For example, "The Frightened Child" may be a constellation of feelings, thoughts, memories, etc., centered around the relational dynamic of being small and vulnerable in the presence of a powerful other who may use that power to harm us.

The next step of the psychosynthesis process is to learn to work with these psychological contents and functions so that we can act and live more effectively and joyfully, releasing energy caught in inner conflicts and using our abilities to the fullest. Key to this part of the process is the development of the will--for Assagioli, that function which enables the self to act as an integrated whole. The will organizes and directs inner energies in the accomplishment of outer action. To develop the will is not just a matter of developing will-power but is much more the development of a skillful will which can work with our thoughts, feelings, imaginations and desires in ways which enable creative action. Dialoging with sub-personalities is one way psychosynthesis attempts to begin the integration of differing, and often conflicting, complexes of associated

feelings/thoughts/etc. so that their emotional energy is freed to enhance, rather than inhibit, the functioning of the self as a whole. Work with feelings, including catharsis and symbolic expression, work with the body, with symbol and with visualization--all contribute to the overall goal of becoming conscious, whole, centered selves who can act with integrity and effectiveness."⁴⁸

Psychosynthesis can give us some insights and techniques for working with selves towards their own centering. It also explicitly includes a spiritual focus. Assagioli suggests that we can move toward a spiritual psychosynthesis where the centered personal self finds its center in its connection to the universal Reality through what he calls the Transpersonal Self. This is the self's place of connection with ultimate Reality through which divine energy flows into human behavior in acts of creativity and compassion. In touch with this center, our agency becomes that of a loving will. The task of psychosynthesis is, finally, to lead people to an awareness and experience of this living Reality so that energies of love, wisdom and compassion can be expressed through their lives and actions.

Two key aspects of psychosynthesis indicate that it can be useful for a feminist therapeutic based on centering

⁴⁸ Assagioli describes numerous techniques for developing the integrating function of the will in The Act of Will.

selves and the erotic power of mutual relation. First, its emphasis on the importance of coming to know and experience the self as a center of awareness whose boundaries are permeable to the collective psychic environment, and where the integrating function of the will allows it to act from that center with power and purpose. And second, its assumption that it is through that center that we experience our connectedness to the divine and this empowers our acts of loving will toward one another. If psychosynthesis is to be helpful to a feminist therapeutic, however, it needs to be located within a more clearly relational framework, because, as it stands, psychosynthesis is primarily a process of self-realization for individual selves. Moreover, Assagioli's theological framework is anathema to feminist theology, particularly in its emphasis on spiritual qualities as somehow higher than the material or creaturely aspects of our existence and in the image of the spiritual journey as that of the lone mountain climber. Nevertheless the techniques that psychosynthesis has developed can be very helpful in the feminist task of developing an empowering center within the self--a center which from a feminist perspective leads us to the depths rather than the heights of our own existence and to the discovery of the

power of our connectedness with one another."

Self in Relation

The centering self provides the kind of strong subjective agency needed to empower strong feminist selves. Can the centering self also convey the relational aspects required by a feminist model of selfhood? At the end of the last chapter, Keller's model of a connective self was critiqued because its locating of the integrity of the self in the self's acts of self-composition or integration diminishes the relationality which the model seeks to uphold.³⁰ It was suggested that self-in-relation theory, which locates the integrity of the self in the clarity and authenticity experienced in mutually enhancing relationships rather than in an individual act of self-composition, confirms a more relational understanding--one where we create our selves with one another. The relationship itself is the locus of the clarity and agency of selves rather than individual acts of self-composition, centering or integration. Does this negate the idea of centering as a meaningful way of understanding the integrity of selves?

" Assagioli attempts to address the relation between selves in terms of the synthesis between love and will through which we "fit into the circle of a wider human solidarity." However, perhaps because of his commitment to an individualized and hierarchical ontology, he fails to address adequately the task of building and sustaining relationships of mutual care in human community. See Act of Will, 86.

³⁰ See pp. 113-17.

It does not--because the process of self-centering can only occur within mutually empathic relationships. Centering is a relational activity. I am able to find my own center as you relate to me as a centered being honoring my own subjectivity, acknowledging my feeling experience, allowing me space in which to speak, and opening yourself to the possibility of being moved and changed by our interaction. It is only in such connection that I know myself as self, as subjective center, and this is where I experience the empowerment of meeting and being met, the flowing of erotic power between us. It is the continual flowing of energy to and fro between us, connecting us, that sustains the centeredness of the self. Self-centering is a process of differentiating within relational interaction.

While self-in-relation theorists do not refer to center in any direct way they do suggest that clarity (a coming into focus), and authenticity about one's own thoughts and feelings, as well as increased energy for action and interaction, arise from the experience of "growth-enhancing" relationships. From the current argument I would suggest that the experience of oneself in such growth-enhancing relationships is the experience of oneself as subject and agent, as center of awareness and initiative. Jean Baker Miller also names an increased zest for life and connection as characteristic of growth-enhancing relating which reflects the release of erotic power in mutual relation.

Within a disconnecting, rather than growth-enhancing, relational context, self-centering cannot occur. In fact, such a context fosters fragmentation, confusion, and inner conflict, precisely the loss of an integrating center. Our ability to experience and act as centered selves is, therefore, a function of our relational environment. It is in mutual relationships which provide empathic responsiveness that we gain clarity about our feelings, thoughts and experience. The capacity of self for centered awareness depends on relationships which allow, rather than contradict or suppress, the breadth and complexity of our conscious experience. The capacity of the self for centered action depends on relationships which allow space for mutual interaction. You give me a center as you allow me to have my own awareness and initiative. As I also do that for you, we create a space of mutual interaction and intersubjectivity. When you allow me to act and interact in relation to you, when you are open to hearing, being moved by and responding to my actions and where I am also open to yours, we experience ourselves as centered selves in relationship. In relationships characterized by an open interactional space, energy and power have room to flow within and between selves. There is room for the spirit to move in our midst, giving birth to creative energy and giving us a deepened sense of life, wholeness and connection.

Self-centering is, therefore, a relational process, one which occurs optimally in mutually empathic relationships. Once we have experienced self-centering within such an environment we can sustain a sense of centeredness in less optimal environments; however, unless we have some relationships which offer us mutuality, it will be hard to maintain our center. Moreover if we have experienced an abusive relational context as children, when we were particularly vulnerable to relational violation, the development of a centering self will be particularly difficult. Towards the end of this chapter we will look at how the centered self can be damaged and fragmented in relationship.

Spaces and Boundaries

It has been argued that the identity and integrity of a feminist self within a relational psychology and theology are given by its centeredness--by its self-centering awareness and centered action. This contrasts with a separative, patriarchal self whose self-definition is given by its boundaries which define itself over and against others. It is now time to look at the boundaries of the centering self which, it has been suggested, are permeable and fluid, and which define the self's relational context.

Relational Boundaries

In Keller's model of the connective self she is careful to avoid any exclusionary boundary that cuts selves off from

one another so that each individual self can embrace the widest possible connectivity. Keller herself is unclear about the role of boundaries--sometimes suggesting they are permeable, sometimes that they are co-extensive with the universe itself, in which case there seems to be no use for boundaries at all. Rather than getting rid of boundaries the concept of permeable boundaries through which we connect with one another needs to be retained. If a model of self has no boundaries then that model loses the ability to articulate the nature of relations between selves and so to describe the kinds of connections selves weave with one another. It was pointed out at the end of the last chapter that this is a weakness in Keller's model.³¹

In contrast to Keller, self-in-relation theory focusses particularly on the ways in which selves mutually structure their connections and disconnections with one another. Self-in-relation theory emphasizes that the permeability and flexibility of the self's boundaries are essential for empathic connectedness. It is in the overlapping interactive connection, the sense of "we-ness," that both self and other are experienced as distinct. Yet self-in-relation does not reject the notion of boundaries; rather,

³¹ Keller resists making any boundary between inside and outside the self, seeing this division as characteristic of the walled selves of patriarchy. I believe that we need a concept of inner space in a feminist theory of selfhood but one with fluid and permeable boundaries. See pp. 229-34.

the experience of boundedness is part of the experience of "me-ness" and "you-ness" that occurs within "we-ness." Thus, although boundaries do not in themselves provide the distinctions between self and other, it is by connecting through the boundaries of self and other, at cognitive and affective levels, that, as selves, we come to know the commonalities and differences that define our own boundedness and limits. Moreover, although they do not define the self, our boundaries do define the nature of our relatedness with one another. It is with and through our boundaries that we negotiate our relatedness with one another.

Boundaries are the places where you and I connect and touch--where you enter me and I enter you, where we know and feel each other. In this touching I know myself to be a self and to be a self in relation to another self. You touch me--I am aware of my skin and the sensations it arouses and I am aware of someone doing the touching; I touch you and I am aware of your skin and aware of myself touching. We experience self and relation together. Through our touching I know you and me in relation. The quality of resistance and tenderness, of the movement and dialogue of our touching, tells me about the quality of our connectedness. In the shifting dynamic I come to know myself but I also come to know the relation and to know you.

The metaphor of physical touching gives a good

understanding of how we connect through our boundaries. As we saw above, the body provides a powerful experience of self as both center and boundary. However, it is important to emphasize that we touch not only at the surface. Our bodies' boundaries are permeable to sensation and emotion. We touch and are touched not just skin-deep--our sensations and emotions and their meanings resonate deep within us. Such mutual touching and intermingling occurs at physical, emotional and intellectual levels simultaneously. As Daniel Stern shows for the maturing infant self, we experience ourselves in relation--an experience of self, of other, and of the relation--within differing physical, affective, intersubjective and semantic relational domains at once.³² Gestalt theory talks about connections in terms of the contact-boundary--that place of connectedness with our environment where the relational activity of the self takes place.³³ Object relations theory sees the self emerging within the interactive "play-space" which is neither fully internal or external--a place of interaction through boundaries.³⁴

Building on these approaches, we can say that the

³² Stern, The Interpersonal World of the Infant. See also above, pp. 101-04.

³³ See Filippi, Of Sweet Grapes, 110, and above, p. 121.

³⁴ See Winnicott, Playing and Reality, and above, pp. 72-76.

boundaries of the centering self, which are fluid and permeable, are important to its relational existence. Its boundaries are mutually structured and negotiated within relationship and tell us about the ways in which we are connected with one another. If we choose unilaterally to establish and defend impermeable boundaries we separate ourselves from relationship and the possibility of intimacy. Thus the patriarchal self in its walled isolation creates, and attempts to maintain, rigid boundaries between self and other so that its relational existence is limited to exerting power-over other selves. It is important to note, however, that the ability unilaterally to establish boundaries when necessary, can be crucial to one's survival within abusive contexts. If others attempt to exert control over one's self or to violate its integrity physically, emotionally, or spiritually, establishing boundaries can serve a temporary protective function. However, this cannot serve to define the self because it cuts us off from our inherent interrelatedness and our desire for connection and leaves us to live as prisoners of our fear. It is only the recovery of a center which can allow the self to open those boundaries again and allow for mutual connection, intimacy and self-empowerment.

Carter Heyward points out the importance of boundaries to our bodily integrity and safety, particularly in the area of sexuality. However, when boundaries become heavily

defended walls, they exclude and separate. We need different kinds of boundaries than these to help us experience strong and empowering connectedness and the flowing of erotic power. "To sustain mutuality we must create our boundaries with one another."⁵⁵ In relationship, we learn to respect boundaries and we also learn how to negotiate boundaries and how to cross them in creative ways. "Like knives, our boundaries can shape or wound, clarify or puncture, sharpen or destroy, our relationships."⁵⁶ My boundaries are not simply mine. They are between us, they are our boundaries, just as your boundaries are also ours. Clarifying the boundaries between us can deepen the potential for both self-awareness and mutual connection. "There is probably no greater relational capacity than to learn, with one another, how to negotiate our boundaries."⁵⁷ Moving from isolated separation is not a matter of getting rid of or dissolving boundaries, then, but of learning how to share, and move through, our boundaries in loving and mutually enhancing ways.

To dismantle boundaries unilaterally does not lead to healthy intimacy any more than does unilaterally establishing impenetrable walls. When we have not negotiated our relationship, so that our boundaries mutually

⁵⁵ Heyward, Touching Our Strength, 112.

⁵⁶ Heyward, Touching our Strength, 112.

⁵⁷ Heyward, Touching our Strength, 113.

open to one another and mutual trust has developed, then to be unbounded is to make ourselves vulnerable inappropriately. Not only does this open us to abuse, it can also be a way of manipulating others to take care of us, to avoid another's anger, or to avoid our own responsibility for mutual relationship. Sarah Hoagland critiques the value placed by many feminists on vulnerability for this reason.⁵⁸ By nature of our interdependence we are vulnerable to one another; however, the goal of a centered selfhood is not to offer our vulnerability to others for abuse or indirectly to elicit their care-taking; rather the goal is to be able to negotiate our boundaries in relationship, being able to open ourselves to, and act within, connection with each other, when and where appropriate.

It is precisely because the centering self is not defined by its boundaries that it has the ability to shift its boundaries to allow them to become more or less permeable depending on the context. Heyward describes how our felt boundaries are very different when we are lying next to a lover in a deserted meadow on a warm day, than they are when we are walking alone in a city at night.⁵⁹ As we allow our boundaries to adjust in relation to our interactional environment, the center of our awareness and of our actions remains the same. Again, it is the center

⁵⁸ Hoagland, 111-13.

⁵⁹ Heyward, Touching Our Strength, 113.

not the boundary that defines the self and gives it integrity. And it is the process of self-centering within the continuous flux of thoughts, feelings and actions accompanying our changing relational interactions, that gives us knowledge and clarity about the relationships in which we are involved.

A self which lacks centeredness has to look to its boundaries to prevent fragmentation and diffusion of the self. Yet while creating a rigid walled self may prevent dissolution it also prevents connectedness so that the self circles around itself and loses touch with its relational experience, which it fears cannot be let in without threat of the loss of self. Cut off from the flow of sensation, feeling and initiative in relationships which provides the self with its sense of aliveness, as well as its awareness of reality, such a self begins to feel empty within its walled isolation. In contrast, a centered self can risk opening its boundaries to allow itself to be reached and touched, and to expand to include others in its awareness, because its integrity is given by its self-centering. The ability to center has been developed, and continues to be affirmed, through mutual interaction in non-abusive contexts. When the center holds the self can open its boundaries without fear of losing itself. Heyward quotes psychologist Susan de Mattos' observation that, "our safety is secured by the quality of our connectedness, not by the

tenacity of our separateness."⁶⁰

In light of the above analysis, much of the recent literature on co-dependent relationships seems to be misplaced. The issue is not one of setting boundaries but rather one of discovering a center of awareness and action within the self and acting from this in relationship. Co-dependent and abusive relationships are based on the fearful self's attempts to get its needs met through control or manipulation rather than through risking mutual interaction. Such a relational dynamic fails to respect and acknowledge the subjectivity of the other and consistently violates the boundaries of both self and other without mutual negotiation. Because of this, the creation of a boundaried space is often the start, but only the start, of the process of self-centering.

Relational Space

The creation and structuring of relational space is itself an important relational task. A mutually empowering relationship creates space for centering; it allows and respects boundaries which create private spaces in space and time. Having a room of one's own allows the self to center, to become aware of its experiencing and to have space for its own creativity. In a mutual relationship I give myself space, and you give me space, to feel, speak and act, within

⁶⁰ Heyward, Touching Our Strength, 112. The implications of this statement for social and international relationships are revolutionary.

the context of our relatedness. I allow your space and time, and you allow mine, because I delight in the mystery that is birthed there and which radiates out to touch me and shape our relationship in new ways. Thus a mutual relationship allows for a solitude which does not deny but enhances relationship.

In an abusive or controlling relationship such spaciousness is threatening--it allows you the mystery of your subjectivity which is outside of my control. Thus abusive relationships tend to be characterized by lack of personal spaces. We attempt to invade, colonize, and control the physical, emotional and spiritual space of another, thus violating their boundaries. Or we attempt to know and absorb the internal spaces of the other into our own. Such is the fusion of enmeshed relationships. In attempting to move out of such patterns, establishing boundaries may help to create personal space where we can experience our subjective reality and define our own center. Such centering, however, usually requires the present, or at least prior, experience of mutually empowering interaction where our feelings, thoughts, and motivations can be heard and received and our own clarity can emerge. Moreover, setting up boundaries which separate us from each other goes against our healthy desire to sustain mutual connection and so can only be a temporary tactic.

Creating a boundaried personal space is often intensely

frightening for the uncentered self caught in an enmeshed relationship, because its inner uncentered chaos is experienced as overwhelming or as void. Facing the inner emptiness, and the painful awareness that can arise within it, can be too frightening to tolerate even when such a space is offered in the context of a mutually empathic relationship. Rather than start to feel and integrate our pain and to take the first steps from our own initiative, it is tempting to fill the void again, perhaps with addictive activities or by staying stuck in reactive forms of interaction. This takes us further and further away from self-centeredness and leaves us in thickly-walled isolation from others. An uncentered self may oscillate between the extremes of rigid separateness or total diffusion without discovering a center which can give awareness, integrity and purpose amidst the chaos.

In twelve-step programs, centering is encouraged both by the empathic mutuality offered by a twelve-step group and by the affirmation of a spiritual center, or Higher Power, which can provide the acceptance, courage and empowerment needed to move out of addiction. While I believe that such programs often allow women to develop a centered self, ideologically they affirm the giving up of self and of one's own power, a point that has been well documented in the

feminist literature.⁶¹ Within a feminist theology of erotic power, self and God cannot be so separated; to center oneself in God is also to center oneself in the deepest core of oneself and to discover a spiritual center is also to discover the possibility of living with power and presence from a fluid, dynamic center within oneself.

It is also important to note here that an uncritical rejection of "fusion" in relationships is problematic for a relational view of selves. We have to be able to "fuse" with one another, to feel with and deeply encounter one another, as we interact and move in and out of each other's boundaries--it is this which strengthens our selves and the quality of our connectedness. Erotic theology names our power to connect through our boundaries in our deepest inner selves, heart to heart rather than surface to surface, as a deeply creative and sacred power. It is not fusion but the lack of centeredness that is problematic.⁶²

Fragmented Selves, Broken Hearts

For selves in relation, disconnecting relational dynamics not only fragment the relationship by refusing the possibility of mutually empowering interaction; they also

⁶¹ See, for example, Charlotte Davis Kasl, Women, Sex and Addiction: A Search for Love and Power (New York: Harper and Row, 1989).

⁶² For a discussion of this issue in relation to lesbian relationships, see Julie Mencher, Intimacy in Lesbian Relationships: A Critical Re-Examination of Fusion, Work in Progress, no. 42 (Wellesley: Stone Center, Wellesley College, 1990).

internally fragment the self resulting in a loss of integrity--the loss of centering awareness and centered action. Hence, abusive forms of power-over relating do not just create relational disconnection and defended, isolated selves; they also create boundaries within the self, such that parts of one's inner experience become walled off and disconnected from consciousness. Such inner boundaries prevent the self from acting as a centered whole because some parts of the self may be unavailable to awareness, and conflict between others prevents their integration. This can lead to various forms of dissociation including, in extreme cases, multiple personality. Here the inner conflicts and "painful contrasts" of awareness and desire can no longer be held together and the self fractures along the fault lines of its multiple experience.⁶³

Brock uses the metaphor of brokenheartedness to talk about the loss of a centering selfhood in non-mutual relationships. She locates our brokenheartedness in our relational experience of violence and disconnection in the family and relates it to the false self described by object relations theory. A healthy child lives in and through heart so that "the false self is the activity of a broken heart."⁶⁴ As argued in Chapter 3, the development and shaping of a clear sense of self depends on the expression,

⁶³ Keller, 225-26.

⁶⁴ Brock, 10.

acknowledgment and integration of feelings, thoughts, needs and perceptions in a relational environment which provides care, protection, security, touching, tenderness and respect for the separate self of the child. This nurturing relational space becomes a play space where play links self and world, and erotic power creates and sustains connectedness, intimacy, generosity and interdependence. When the relational environment fails to produce such nurturing interaction, the true self of the child is neither received nor affirmed, and its feelings and behaviors are denied or punished as unacceptable. Inner fragmentation begins as the child develops a rigid, isolated, fearful self--a false self. The ability to play, to engage in open mutual interaction, is lost and with it the experience of the true self and its ability to distinguish between inner and outer worlds. The centered focussed energy of erotic power that plays with the world can no longer flow.

In this analysis the false self, with its broken heart, can no longer live from its center. When its feelings are denied or punished, it becomes confused and its actions no longer come integrated from within but come from the search for outer validation. The false self looks for its identity in the approval of others or in material achievement but this fails to address the vacant center which haunts the false self with depression. Living from the false self instead of from the center helps the self to avoid facing

the brokenheartedness at its center and the pain experienced in intimate and family relationships but fails to provide an empowering sense of self or of relational connection.

Fragmented, uncentered selves cannot provide a connecting relational dynamic for others. As the false self becomes an adult it is characterised by depression and self-alienation and a deep need for connection, but its capacities for feeling and interaction are distorted and diminished. The fear engendered by its early experience of relationship discourages it from taking the risk of open mutual interaction. It continues to relate through control and coercion where it uses others, including its children, to meet its needs.

Christa McNerney uses Alice Miller's analysis, this time from the standpoint of self-in-relation theory, to look at the fragmenting effects to self and relationship caused by incest.⁶⁵ McNerney's analysis names childism, the neglect, abuse and exploitation of children to meet the needs of adults, as the major carrier of oppressive social relations from one generation to the next. She argues that we are born into a historically and politically developed power of estrangement and destruction which is greater than ourselves and in which we partake. Because the unconscious wounds of childhood limit our freedom and capacity as grown adults to feel, think, and act in responsible ways towards

⁶⁵ See McNerney, The Power to Maim.

those in our lives, we use our children to protect our selves from our own needs and feelings of vulnerability or dependency.

McNerney suggests that the choice for separation and competition and the choice for unilateral, utilitarian and non-empathic relating are choices from fear: fear of the other and particularly of the other's difference. It is a decision to distrust and subjugate rather than take the risk of relating subject to subject, center to center. McNerney argues that sin is breaking the connections that allow for flowing mutual interaction and replacing them with violent modes of connection. Because of our own inner fragmentation we sin against others. Facing the fear that we displace onto our children involves taking responsibility for our individual isolation and inner fragmentation and the negative effects these have on the larger system.⁶⁶

McNerney names callousness, apathy and contempt as signs of inner fragmentation which result from divisions within ourselves made to shield us from our pain and fear. Callousness hardens the self against feeling. Apathy is a way of enduring suffering which cuts us off from involvement in the life and suffering of others while contempt against those weaker in the hierarchy shields us from facing our own weakness.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ McNerney, 92-136.

⁶⁷ McNerney, 130-133.

McNerney shows how disconnection and fragmentation occur at many levels when a person is violated by another. The relational split is initially a disconnection within the person who perpetrates the violating action. The action then fractures the connection between the perpetrator and the victim. Fragmentation then begins to occur within the victim's self where confusion and pain lead to self-doubt and repression, and the pain is contained by splitting feeling from consciousness. The split-off pain is then acted out on the self or on others and the original disconnection is passed on through the world.

In the case of incest, the perpetrator himself is fragmented internally, dissociated from his own feelings of empathy for the child and of responsibility toward her.⁶⁶ By dissociating, he is able to see the child as an object to meet his need for pleasure and comfort, and hence to use the child to meet his needs without feeling vulnerable or dependent and without having to engage in a relationship of mutuality and reciprocity. The experience of childhood sexual abuse is profoundly fragmenting for a child. It is a

⁶⁶ I follow McNerney's usage of the male pronoun for the perpetrator and the female pronoun for the victim because this reflects the majority of cases of sexual abuse. McNerney relates the documented effects of childhood sexual abuse to Stern's developmental model of the self and shows how incest can damage the self's sense of agency, of physical cohesion, of continuity, of affectivity, of intersubjectivity, of organization, and of communicating meaningfully with others.

physically and affectively overwhelming experience and the child does not have the emotional or cognitive maturity to maintain her self against it. Emotional and cognitive confusion is generated by the fact that a loved one who is supposed to protect her is violating her integrity. Often the overwhelming and confusing affect cannot be reconciled and the child responds by dissociating her mind from her body. To maintain a feeling of power over her body she must dissociate from it, and from the feelings of helplessness and confusion that accompany abuse. The self often splits into a bad self who is being punished for transgressing and a good self who can remain worthy of love. Inner conflict between love and rage for her parents, and distrust and hatred of her body, remains hidden in her psyche. Unless therapeutic connections are made between her relational experience and their psychic damage, the long-term effects of such fragmentation will be carried into later intimate relationships where high levels of fear and negative self-identities can lead to relational conflict, simmering anger, sexual problems, and self-destructive behavior."

Less extreme experiences of relational disconnection also fragment the self and leave it confused about its feelings and indecisive about its actions. Jean Baker Miller describes how the self-in-relation suffers confusion and loss of self-clarity when another blocks or refuse to

" McNerney, 137-77.

engage with the self, or when another expects to be taken care of rather than engaging in mutual empathy.⁷⁰ This leaves the self conflicted, wanting to respond empathetically but also feeling angry and cut off. This initial confusion solidifies into a more pervasive alienation from the self. Fear, anxiety and anger become prominent but are not relationally received and therefore have to be denied. To stay in the relationship the self will try to want what the other wants so that behavior becomes separated from feelings. This exacerbates the feeling of being wrong, bad and unworthy. To go on maintaining connection in such a relationship is profoundly disconnecting and the self becomes relationally immobilized, cut off from intersubjective and empathic relationship while maintaining the connection of exploitation. Social institutions of hierarchical power such as sexism, racism and heterosexism are felt in myriad minor as well as major disconnections which wear away at the self, binding its energy and pulling it off-center.

Baker Miller illustrates her argument with an example of a disconnecting conversation between a married couple. The husband, disconnected from his own feelings about death, is unable to hear his wife's feelings of grief and fear when she hears that her friend has cancer. Disaffirming her feelings weakens her inner connectedness and through

⁷⁰ Jean Baker Miller, Connections, Disconnections.

establishing a protective distance he objectifies his wife and her friend and loses the possibility for intimate connection. She is left confused about her feelings and conflicted between her sadness, her anger at his reaction, and her wish to maintain connection with him. Minor disconnections occur regularly in our relationships as we fail to hear or understand another, or fail to express our own experience truthfully and directly. Such disconnections can, however, deepen relational connection when hurt and anger can be expressed, received and responded to in ways which restore connection.”⁷¹

In dissociation and fragmentation the self loses its internal cohesiveness, the center cannot hold, the heart breaks. In one's inner space painful memories threaten to engulf one; dark places seem to house monsters; empty wastes echo with dead voices; conflicting urges and feelings fight one another for expression; sub-personalities clamor for attention.

One of the most pervasive and disempowering inner conflicts which fragments the self is that between the self and its inner judge or critic. At best disapproving and distrustful, at worst ruthlessly punishing and critical,

⁷¹ Indeed, it is often in disconnection that we experience our differences and being able to move from disconnection to re-connection is a relational skill. Thus disconnection can be a path towards deepening our intimacy and knowledge of each other. (See discussion on difference below.)

this internal voice undermines and paralyzes one's sense of worth and agency. The judge's criticism causes us to self-monitor, to keep looking at ourselves from the outside-in, thus preventing us from living from our own center. It also fragments our selves into good and bad parts fostering shame and guilt which lead away from open connection with others. The debilitating presence of the internal critic is what Starhawk names the self-hater. She argues that the self-hater is the root pattern, and internal manifestation, of a society based on hierarchical relations of power-over. The self-hater possesses us all, acting to undermine any acts of resistance and transformation, and leaving us feeling worthless and powerless.

Starhawk's "liberation psychology" analyzes the power-over ways in which society continues to shape and bind our energy and action through self-hate and imposed powerlessness. She then describes the ways we can work toward resistance, renewal and liberation. To work toward liberation we need to reclaim our power to transform our selves and our world. Such power is both "power-from-within," which is the immanent sacred power found within all living beings rooted in the power of the erotic (Starhawk defines the erotic as our deep drives to experience and share pleasure, to connect and create), and also our "power-with" one another to shape and shift the patterns of

relationship among us toward our mutual empowerment.⁷² This seems to parallel the process described in this chapter where the power of awareness and initiative is found at the center of the self in mutual connection with other centering selves.

Starhawk sees the self-hater as manifesting itself within us not only as the Judge, who offers us value in return for our obedience, but also as the Censor who inhibits us from speaking our truth and feeds our shame; the Orderer who attempts to impose rigid control on our feelings and our lives; the Conqueror/Defender who offers protection in turn for allegiance and reminds us that we cannot trust anyone; and the Master of Servants who suggests that we can gain worth and value by serving others. These "sub-personalities" fragment our selves into opposing parts and prevent the possibility of centered awareness and action. Relational interactions and communal situations which foster growth, healing and empowerment are, in Starhawk's view, those which restore a sense of immanent and inherent value, provide protection from abuse, break the silence of the Censor, offer freedom from the Judge's discipline, meet each persons needs in balanced and sustainable ways and evoke the

⁷² Starhawk, Truth or Dare, 15.

experience of mystery and wonder."⁹

Sewing the Fragments, Healing the Heart

Our selves have, then, been historically fragmented and we continue to experience the fragmenting effects of non-mutual relationship. The process of self-centering in mutual relation allows the heart to heal and stitches the fragments of the self back together. It requires the presence of others whom we can trust to provide the kind of relational connections within which we can heal. Self-centering, we re-connect the self as we also reconnect with others, discovering relationships which we can trust and which enable us to open our hearts to mutual engagement. As Brock argues, to heal the wounds of the broken heart requires that we take responsibility for recognizing our own damage and finding relationships that will empower healing. Such healing is a communal activity. Together we need to recreate among ourselves many "play-spaces" where creativity and connection can happen. In individual therapy, self-help groups, group rituals, church communities we may find places where we can share our pain and anger and find it mirrored in the unafraid, compassionate eyes of others. When we find relational contexts which offer the possibility of such mutually empathic interaction, self-clarity and

⁹ Starhawk, Truth or Dare, 97. Starhawk also emphasizes the power of ritual in the making of loving patterns of relation. Rituals are patterned actions which create and allow situations where we can feel erotic life-sustaining power moving through us and among us.

relational agency emerge from our centering selves.

The process of self-centering is first one of awareness--awareness of our current experience and of our past experiences of pain and fear. This involves dissolving the walls between mind, emotion, and body; bringing back to consciousness emotions that we do not wish to feel; recalling memories we would rather forget; and letting the numb parts of ourselves come painfully back to life. The recovery and reconnection of our feelings, both internally to our minds and bodies and externally to the situations which generated them, is the first step towards centering the self. We know we are alive because we are feeling. We know we are connected because those feelings tell us about our relatedness and whether it is abusive or mutually empathic. And despite the pain we know we are coming back to life because we feel energy moving within us, empowering us to make changes. As we are able to sit with our pain in the presence of trusted others, we learn to rest at our center with clear awareness of what we find there. As we feel our fears of abandonment, violence and dependency we no longer need to reach out compulsively to assuage our neediness and quiet our fears. As we keep centering we may come to rest at a deeper level where we know once again our own worth and feel the power rising deep within us which says "yes" to life and to relationship and to joy. As the erotic flows once more we can begin to trust in the goodness

of our radical interdependence, no longer fearful of opening our hearts.

Mutuality and Difference

The flowing of erotic power integrates all aspects of the self, giving us the experience of centered wholeness and grounding our experience in the concreteness of our connections to the self, to our bodies, to others, and to our world. Connecting with others' erotic power energizes us from our centers and empowers us to act against oppression and toward change. Anger can be the first sign of the stirring of erotic power within a self that has been violated and fragmented. Anger comes from the powerful life energy within us which requires our self-affirmation and connection with others for its survival. Brock suggests that such anger "rises from the center of our being, raw, shaking and hopeful."⁷⁴ Anger can help us to find our center, to perceive ourselves as distinct, to claim our own feelings, and to assert our own agency. Thus, as Beverly Harrison argues, anger is part of the "work of love" which attempts to move us toward centered selving and mutual relation.⁷⁵ It signals when relationship is being violated.

Anger can only help our self-centering and our mutual connectedness, however, when it is recognized and embraced as an aspect of ourselves, through which we come to

⁷⁴ Brock, 19.

⁷⁵ Harrison, Making the Connections, 3-21.

understand our hurt and our relational world. If such anger is used to violate oneself or another rather than being integrated and understood (for example in undifferentiated relationships where reactive anger cycles back and forth continually fragmenting and wounding each person) it will not lead us to the self-clarity, mutual understanding and relational healing that it seeks.

Anger is also a warning against superficial connections which fail to honor the unique subjectivity of individual selves and the profound differences between selves. In this regard, Susan Thistlethwaite argues that we need to be suspicious of white feminist's urge to make connections. Given that as white, middle-class women our selves have been forged by the dominant culture to provide the connections and play the cohesive role in service of a socioeconomic system which is unjust and oppressive, we need to be deeply suspicious of our tendency to make connections "no matter what." She argues powerfully that we need to ask what and whom our connections are serving. Too often our connections can mask and obscure very real injustices and hurts, rather than moving toward the kind of connections which will enhance the selfhood of all. Believing in an ideal of a connected world we can also ignore our own responsibility for the violence that breaks the web--for example, our own racism. Thistlethwaite confesses: "As a member of the white women's movement, I have not confronted the terror of

difference. Instead, I have sought to obliterate it in 'connections.'"⁷⁶ Empowering connectedness only comes when we face the differences between us, the hurt, the conflict and the pain which constitute our current relatedness.

It is easy to jump over the pain to a premature connectedness. Connections are significant. Yet we forget "the fact that these connections may be like flint on tinder."⁷⁷ Connection can be terrifying and can hurt. To assume that to engage one another from our own centers will always be a pleasant experience is mistaken. As Daly argues, centering selves "spark" with one another. Hence, the mutual relationships within which the centering self emerges, while they are empathic, are not conflict-free. They are characterized by the commitment to understand, to respect and explore difference, hurt and anger, without trying to change, control, or diminish one another's experience and clarity. The expression of anger and hurt lets us know when we have unintentionally violated another's being, helps us to see the other more clearly, and to find a way to move together to a deeper level of connection. Thus, in a mutual relationship tensions are sustained and difference is present. We learn with others to experience both anger and compassion as essential dimensions of mutuality.

⁷⁶ Thistlethwaite, 89.

⁷⁷ Thistlethwaite, 91.

The vision of mutuality toward which both theologies of erotic power and psychologies of relational selves point, is not the same as equality, although it tries to embody equality. Equality and reciprocity can characterize relationship between separated selves, whereas mutuality speaks of our interconnectedness. The incarnation of mutuality is friendship. In mutual relation we call each other forth into our most creative liberating possibilities and seek to become more fully ourselves with one another as we co-create our selves and our common well-being. Heyward characterizes mutuality as a dynamic relational movement often charged with tension; a process where two or more struggle to share power among them, where they wrestle to embody friendship more fully, and to stand and walk with one another, recognizing and respecting difference and reducing inequality.⁷⁸

Heyward emphasizes that mutuality is hard work. We cannot make ourselves feel mutual or fake friendship. Learning, and relearning, with one another what it means to love one another, requires that we be honest, real, and present with one another, as we journey together through brokenness and pain toward caring and tenderness. As Heyward argues, we all live within flawed relational dynamics of dominance and submission and so it takes a long time, much love, and revolutionary patience with ourselves

⁷⁸ Heyward, Touching Our Strength, 104-07.

and each other, to learn how to let go of our separateness and to risk reaching out to touch and be touched; it takes time to learn to touch with respect and tenderness without taking or grasping; it takes time "to learn with one another, that our power to love is stronger than the fear festering in our alienation."⁷⁹ Heyward tells us that if we are committed to moving toward radical mutuality, and learning to live as a "commonpeople," we must be open to the possibilities of transformation; to suffering, struggling, celebrating and "godding" together; to befriending rather than fearing the world. We can only learn these relational lessons together as we learn "to reach through our unique particulars to our common strength, our shared vulnerability, and our relational pleasure."⁸⁰

Thistlethwaite, like Heyward, reminds us of the importance of difference as well as connection within mutual relation, and draws our attention to the deep and wide walls which fragment our social reality. She broadens the scope of the enquiry into a feminist self, beyond the struggle of individual, middle-class white women to overcome their co-dependency, reclaim their embodiedness and assert their own agency, to an understanding of the wider social relations of class and race and their impact on women's selves and the relationships between us.

⁷⁹ Heyward, Touching Our Strength, 58.

⁸⁰ Heyward, Touching Our Strength, 100.

The analysis presented here needs to be extended to consider how, collectively, we might begin to heal the broken heart, the fractured self, of our society. This takes us beyond the context of personal therapy, or group self-help, to the political task of building a commonpeople --multiple, varied, but with an integrity that reconnects our fragmented subcultures and joins them in the shared purpose of enhancing our common well-being.

Encountering our difference and learning to connect lovingly through the rigid boundaries that our current social relations uphold, means, as Maria Lugones beautifully describes, learning to travel into other worlds--worlds of different races, sexes, sexualities and cultures."¹ Only through such "world-traveling" can we hope to identify with, and so truly connect with, those who are very different from ourselves. Lugones describes how traveling to another's world with loving perception, rather than with an arrogant perception which attempts to seize another's world for our own, is to see the other's world through their eyes; to let ourselves know how we are seen in their eyes, however unfavorably; and so to let ourselves be changed within that world as we explore the possibilities of connectedness. Sharing our worlds in this way we become real, solid subjects to each other. This is mutually empathic

¹ Lugones, "Playfulness, 'World'-Traveling, and Loving Perception," in Women, Knowledge and Reality, eds. Garry and Pearsall, 275-90.

interaction in its fullest sense.

As we spin ourselves from the living reality of our worlds, and learn to live as centering selves, we need to learn how to enter other worlds with love and respect, openly expecting to be transformed by whomever we encounter there. As we weave ourselves together in mutually empowering ways at social as well as personal levels, as we move with and against each other in communities of resistance and solidarity,⁸² we may begin, in Keller's imagery, to divine the depths of Eros at our centers, to feel the shock of the connection always becoming flesh, specific, unique, between us and among us.⁸³

The Centering Self

The following description, which concludes this chapter, summarizes the vision of a centered and centering self in relation developed in the foregoing discussion.

The selfhood of individual persons emerges in relationship. In order for that selfhood to be well-functioning, a self must be given the opportunity to differentiate as a center of awareness and creativity within growth-enhancing relationships. Such relationships are characterized by mutuality and empathy where the unique reality of each self is acknowledged, respected, engaged

⁸² Sharon Welch weaves her theological reflections around this theme in Communities of Resistance and Solidarity.

⁸³ Keller, 250.

with and delighted in. The centering self emerges within such relationships and a centered self is required to sustain such relationships.

A centered self has a sense of integrity, she knows herself as a center of awareness and action within a network of dynamic relationships. A centered self is aware of and expresses her own feelings, needs, desires, thoughts. Knowing her own reality, a centered self participates in that reality. She experiences her response-ability and knows herself as an agent, making choices and initiating action. The centered self knows her own power to create and destroy and the limits of that power.

The centered self is an open, fluid, dynamic system continually integrating awareness, meaning and purpose. Centering selves co-create in relational space their possibilities of being and becoming. The boundaries of the centering self are created with other selves. The centering self can allow her boundaries to be open, flexible and negotiable. She can allow herself to receive and enter into others experience at different levels of encounter. Through this process the centered self is aware of, respects and is responsive to the feelings and desires of others. Because she has the capacity to live from her center, the centering self can detach herself from addictions and let go into the relational matrix of which she is a part. The centering self touches the erotic power at the heart of life and lives

with heart. She experiences the creative power at her center which is part of the creative power of the universe in its unfolding.

Relationships of coercion and inequality do not foster centering selving. To grow as centering selves we need to grow in relationships where we are acknowledged as centers of awareness, action and creativity--where we are responded to as unique selves. In abusive relationships, the wounded self retreats into fragmentation and isolation. Internalization of experiences of cruelty, rejection and indifference create an inner space characterized by self-hate, denial and repression and lead to relational interactions characterized by shame, guilt, fear. We become separative or soluble selves isolated from our connectivity and creativity in relation to ourselves and each other. Separated selves with defensive, rigid boundaries can only relate through bargaining, manipulation, control, coercion and violence and there can be no joint participation in co-creating a mutually enhancing reality.

Healing of relational woundedness takes place in a relational space which offers mutuality and empathy--a playspace of encounter with another/others who acknowledge our feelings and experience, and who engage with and respond to us as unique, valued, creative participants in relationship.

In such a relational space the following process can

take place. The unspeakable can be spoken and received, and the depths of our fear, pain, anger and longing can be experienced and heard. We can discover the disowned and fragmented parts of our selves-in-relation. Those complexes of emotional experience that have gone unintegrated, the woundedness from the past that remains deep within us, can be invited to emerge. The awareness, acceptance, and forgiveness of our lives can be facilitated. The possibility of integration--of finding a center that can integrate our many-faceted selves and experiences can be held up. Naming and exorcizing the voices of self-hate within us and dissolving the bonds with which we have attempted to control and console ourselves, we get to know ourselves and delight in our being as we are also known and delighted in. Discovering a center we discover our power to act, to be creative, spontaneous, relational. We discover our ethical response-ability and risk new action in relationship. We begin to discern the mystery of our own life and purpose and to find the courage to live by heart with courage, passion and grace-full-ness.

As people of faith we are called to risk living from our centers, to struggle together to deepen the mutuality of our relational connections at personal, social and institutional levels. We are called to learn to love one another in more profound and passionate ways than we ever thought possible, discovering the living power that flows

within us when we touch each other from heart to heart.

CHAPTER 5

Centering Selves in Practice

Pastoral counseling is a ministry of the faith community which proclaims that healing, wholeness and empowerment can be found in therapeutic engagement with people within a faith context. As pastoral counselors we are ministers as well as therapists. These are not distinct roles but are woven together in our practice--our ministry is our therapy, and our therapy, ministry. This chapter explores the implications for the ministry of pastoral counseling of the relational model of centering selves that has been developed here and offers some suggestions for a feminist therapeutic based on such a model.

The Ministry of Pastoral Counseling

From the standpoint of feminist liberation theology, ministry expresses in words and actions the liberating power of God, which seeks to set all beings free from bondage to fear, violence and exploitation. Ministry seeks to make real, in concrete acts of caring and justice, the healing and empowering love of God; to incarnate in the everyday events, relationships and concrete social realities of our lives, the presence of life and love, joy and justice. Ministry is the action of God's people in the world, God's

hands and voices and bodies, tending wounds, resisting oppression, feeding one another, birthing new life and deepening the bonds of community.¹

To come to the ministry of pastoral counseling from the standpoint of feminist liberation theology is to see the work of pastoral counseling as part of the broader work of liberation. Thus the healing and empowerment of individuals is set within the context of a wider call to the co-creation of a community of peace and justice. The ministry of pastoral counseling is, therefore, part of our communal struggle to resist the oppressive social and interpersonal forces which act against our common well-being, and part of our communal search for healing, loving community and social transformation. Within a theology of erotic power such ministry is grounded in and empowered by the presence and erotic power of God, incarnate among us, moving within and among us.

Learning to Love One Another

A theology of erotic power reminds us that we are a wounded people whose personal and social relations are characterized by violence and abuse so that the "power of mutual relation is in eclipse."² As described in earlier

¹ Ministry is "godding"--the "embodiment or incarnation of God's love in human flesh, with the goal of co-creating with God a just and loving human society." See Virginia Mollenkott, Godding: Human Responsibility and the Bible (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 2.

² Heyward, Touching Our Strength, 56.

chapters, our society and families have shaped our inner lives and capacity for relationship in destructive ways, producing selves out of touch with erotic power and fearful of mutual relation. Many of us are victims of violence-- socio-economic, emotional, physical and sexual abuse; many more have never known the security of caring, mutually respectful relationship in their families or communities; many others suffer discrimination and prejudice because of race, gender, class, ethnic background or sexual orientation. We have not been treated, and we do not treat each other, as sacred beings worthy of respect and tenderness. In our own woundedness we wound each other. Pastoral counseling is called to respond to this situation of relational woundedness.

It is called, therefore, to address our communal task of learning how to love one another, learning how to love one another as friends; not as an abstract ideal, but in the chaotic embodied messiness of the relationships and communities in which we live, with all their frustrations, imperfections and limitations. Called to help us learn with one another concrete ways in which we can live with one another at a deeper level of connection and caring. Called to help us experience the goodness of our aliveness and the joy of our capacities for mutual relation. The love we need to learn for one another is erotic love--embodied and passionate--known in our enjoyment of ourselves and one

another, our passion for the well-being of our commonpeople, our anger at injustice, and our celebration of life and relationship.

Addressing our relational woundedness, pastoral counseling is a ministry of healing--binding wounds, cleaning festering sores, restoring sight, sewing the broken limbs back together--enabling individuals to walk once again. Personal woundedness is, from a liberation perspective, a result of social injustice and relational oppression, and so the task of healing is also one of education and exorcism. Education identifies the ways oppressive social structures have shaped and continue to form our feelings, behaviors and relationships through encouraging the suppression of feeling and the distortion of connective bonds between people into patterns of dominance and submission. Through exorcism of the demons internalized within our psyches, which perpetrate destructive effects from generation to generation, we are empowered to act toward change.

The liberating work of pastoral counseling, therefore, calls us out from bondage to the inner forces of self-hate, fear, neurotic guilt, violence, addiction and isolation, which take us away from knowing our immanent value as living beings and from knowing our power to create, to be tender and loving with one another, and to live together in non-violent, sustainable ways. And the liberating work of

pastoral counseling calls us to the constructive task of building structures and relationships which will enable the incarnation of love and justice in human community.

No Longer Servants but Friends

Pastoral counseling is traditionally seen as part of the ministry of service--diakonia.³ As Dunfee has articulated, service cannot stand as a model for ministry within a liberation framework because, as we have seen, images of altruism and service have kept women, and other oppressed groups, from finding their own agency and empowerment. Dunfee quotes Moltmann: "The truly liberating and empowering relationship is one that expresses care as a being with others, rather than a service for others."⁴ Moreover, ministry is not something one person does alone but something that emerges between people as they relate to one another in mutually empowering ways.

A feminist ministry of pastoral counseling must be based on models of friendship and co-creation rather than

³ Howard Clinebell relates pastoral counseling to this and other traditional functions of ministry in Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling: Resources for a Ministry of Healing and Growth, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), 47-71. As the title suggests Clinebell himself sees pastoral counseling as a ministry of healing and growth. From a liberation perspective the images of healing and growth are insufficient on their own because the socio-economic realities that create and sustain our woundedness also need to be addressed.

⁴ Dunfee, Beyond Servanthood, 138.

service."⁵ Dunfee names freedom and authority as foundational to such ministry--"the freedom to respond to the world within one's own center of authority according to one's obligation to work for the creation of a greater freedom."⁶ Thus, from a feminist liberation perspective, the ministry of pastoral counseling is a call to accept the responsibility of one's own freedom and to act from one's own center of authority to call others to their freedom, power and responsibility in our co-creation of a better world. Rather than a service for others, then, the ministry of pastoral counseling is a befriending and liberating of one another in service of our co-creation of the kin-dom. It is a ministry which requires that we act with integrity from our own center.

In the work of pastoral counseling we encounter others in ways which we hope will foster liberation. While much pastoral counseling is practiced within a therapeutic model where the pastoral counselor meets once a week with individuals, couples, families and sometimes small groups, the above discussion suggests that many times and places may be the locus for pastoral counseling. If the task of pastoral counseling is to help us to learn what it is to love one another--to embody relationships and communities

⁵ See Lynn Rhodes, Co-creating: A Feminist Vision of Ministry (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987) for an exploration of these themes.

⁶ Dunfee, Beyond Servanthood, 144.

where the joy and power of mutual relation can flow among us--pastoral counseling can be practiced in a wide variety of settings, wherever we gather in twos, small groups or as a people with the intent of healing ourselves and connecting with one another in mutually empowering ways. Group ritual, worship, retreat and workshop experiences are obvious examples, but so are political actions, communal work and socio-economic support activities--all can be modes through which the flow of erotic power can be felt in the birth of hope and creativity, in loving acts and in the restoration of right relationship.

From the perspective outlined here, pastoral counseling is located within a faith community, and within a geographic community, and holds the vision of moving toward the realization of mutuality and right relationship at all levels within those communities, including in its relation to the land and to the socio-economic structures that support its life.⁷ Thus, pastoral counseling can involve challenging the ways in which the community of faith, and the wider community, is functioning destructively, recognizing and enabling the ways in which it is functioning creatively, and sustaining the community in resistance to

⁷ Linda Filippi describes the implications for pastoral counseling of a regenerative, earth-centered focus where counseling centers are connected to their physical location, and sensitive to the need for economic conversion and sustainable living in harmony with the earth. See Of Sweet Grapes, 199-227.

the powers and principalities that take us away from realizing the love of God and neighbor.

Sacred Space

Pastoral counseling affirms the presence and power of God in our lives and relationships. Every counseling encounter, be it with individuals, couples or groups, therefore takes place in sacred space, where we meet one another as friends, as equals, in the presence of God. Within such sacred space, pastoral counseling is primarily a ministry of presence, of "being-with" in mutually empathic ways. This presence has both sacramental and prophetic dimensions. Sacramentally, it is a place for the healing, birthing, guiding power of the living God to enter our lives, a place where we may encounter the presence of the sacred--the erotic, the life-giving, healing power at the heart of life--and feel its presence and power within ourselves and within a community of mutuality. We feel sacred power and presence entering our lives when we acknowledge and express our emotions, needs and wants, including the pain of the past, in such sacred space. Here the power of mutual relation can loosen the bonds of self-hate, guilt, shame and fear so that we can find self-forgiveness, reconciliation, and acceptance. Here we can experience passion and power being released within ourselves, and in solidarity with each other, which empower us to engage in liberating acts of resistance and renewal.

The pastoral counseling encounter is prophetic as well as sacramental. It hopes to move individuals toward creative action. Beyond a concern for any one individual's empowerment, personal healing or self-fulfillment, it embodies a concern for their moral agency and for our communal well-being. It therefore challenges people with their power to act creatively and destructively in relation to themselves and others and helps individuals learn to relate in creative rather than destructive ways--to relate in empathic and mutually empowering ways. In this way, as Harrison suggests, therapy can be seen as moral education which teaches us how to recognize, choose and sustain right relationship. The prophetic dimension of pastoral counseling also names the ways oppressive social structures have impacted our lives and connects personal experience with its wider relational context. Seeing personal change as ultimately linked to social change through our discovery of our ability to use our creative power to shape a better world with one another, it tries to listen for the particular ways individuals and groups may be being called to particular manifestations of this communal work.

A Feminist Therapeutic for Pastoral Counseling **The Therapeutic Relationship**

Feminist pastoral counseling has been described so far as mutual encounter, empathic presence, ethical challenge, and openness to the sacred. The practice of pastoral

counseling within the traditional therapeutic relationship will now be considered.⁹ The characteristics of mutuality and empathic connection which we have emphasized above are central to feminist psychotherapy in general, and self-in-relation theory in particular, and so a feminist therapeutic for pastoral counseling draws much from these approaches. Stone Center psychologist Alexandra Kaplan stresses the empathic mode of the self-in-relation approach to therapy where the "particular emphasis is on how a mutually empathic mode empowers individuals and the relational process, and leads to the desire for further connection."¹⁰

Feminist psychotherapies committed to the empowerment of women and the dismantling of hierarchical relationship of power-over, have critiqued traditional psychotherapeutic models for sustaining hierarchical power dynamics.¹⁰ For example, Kaplan points out that "a hierarchical relationship, differential distribution of power and control, and the power to define 'reality' and determine the

⁹ The focus will primarily be on pastoral counseling with individuals. Space precludes expanding what is said here to counseling with couples, families and groups although most of what is said can also be applied in these contexts. I use female pronouns for client and therapist because my primary focus has been on women's selves. I believe this approach can also be used by male therapists and is also helpful in working with male clients provided gender difference is taken into account.

¹⁰ Kaplan, 8.

¹⁰ See Susan Sturdivant, Therapy with Women: A Feminist Philosophy of Treatment (New York: Springer, 1980).

nature of the process," work against a mutually engaging process of joint collaboration.¹¹ Neither the psychoanalytic medical model of distanced professional expertise, nor the humanistic model of facilitating individual autonomy and fulfillment, are adequate within an interrelational understanding of psychopathology which locates symptomatology in the psychopolitical realities of violence, objectification and disconnection.¹² While appreciating an emphasis on broader systems, feminist therapists also critique family therapy for failing to address gender-specific power dynamics in the family, although recent feminist family therapy does address these issues.¹³

Feminist therapy locates psychological problems in the struggles of individuals within particular socio-political contexts, and the locus of healing in therapy lies in its interrelational, interactive process. As Kaplan states it, "we see growth as resulting from active participation in relational processes."¹⁴ Feminist therapy embodies two foundational commitments: the empowerment of women and the mutuality of the therapeutic relationship. The first

¹¹ Kaplan, 6.

¹² See McNerney, 178-87.

¹³ See Harriet Goldhor Lerner, Women in Therapy; and M. McGoldrick, C. Anderson, and F. Walsh, eds., Women In Families (New York: Norton, 1990).

¹⁴ Kaplan, 8.

affirms the personal power and agency of women in relation to their own lives and sees the client as acting and making choices within a relational context which offers both constraints and possibilities. The second affirms the equality of worth between client and therapist; the mutuality of the therapeutic task to which both contribute --the client by sharing her experience, insights and intuitions, the therapist by bringing her own personal and therapeutic knowledge of human selves and relationship; and the interactive nature of the therapeutic process whereby both client and therapist are open to engagement and emotional connection.¹⁵ Thus, Kaplan describes the Stone Center's approach to therapy as follows:

At the heart of our clinical work is our belief in therapy as a mutual endeavor in which both client and therapist engage in a shared process of experience, attention and effort. . . . Both will be attuned to the experience of the other and their understanding of it, taking in and responding to the other's affect and working, each in her own way, toward mutual growth and mutual enhancement."¹⁶

The development of mutual trust is the foundation of an empathic therapeutic relationship. The client trusts the therapist to risk reaching out for help and support, and the therapist trusts the client's basic integrity and sincerity and the validity of her experience. The therapist's role is

¹⁵ Many of these points are elaborated in McNerney, 187-98.

¹⁶ Kaplan, 13-14.

one of respectful partner in the joint task of working with the client's concerns, feelings and goals. The therapist brings her training and expertise; however, the client's experience is where truth is finally located, and the therapist trusts the client's behavior as "understandable responses to inner and outer conflicts, both within and without the therapy setting."¹⁷

The therapeutic relationship is, therefore, characterized by empathy, cooperation and a profound mutuality where counselor and client relate as subject to subject, mutual partners joined in a shared exploration and search for healing and empowerment. Feminist pastoral counseling places this empathic, cooperative therapeutic relationship within a theological context. As suggested earlier, the counseling encounter is sacred relational space--a place of meeting, of possibility, of invitation to transformation, where two or more people can play together;¹⁸ a place of discovery and adventure where we may be surprised by the presence of God. It is a meeting--an encounter between persons, with the possibility of connecting at significant levels, deepening relationship and discovering new life, love and power. The client and counselor bring their humanness--all the experiences and

¹⁷ Kaplan, 7.

¹⁸ David Winnicott described therapy as two people playing together. See Playing and Reality.

particularities that make up their lives--and together offer each other possibilities for new ways of being and relating. The focus is on the client and the concerns that she brings to that sacred space. The counselor provides a ministry of presence, attending, meeting and receiving the client in what she brings. Both engage in a joint task of listening; of exploring the contours of the clients woundedness; of gently opening up places of pain; of discovering the places where life and passion are moving within the client and in her relational world.

Feminist pastoral counseling calls for vigilance in regard to the power dynamics operating within the relationship and is sensitive to when disconnections and violations occur. As counselor, I notice when I am feeling controlling or superior or dominant; or when I am feeling victimized or manipulated. And I attempt to address that in the therapeutic relationship to restore mutuality and connection and affirm our equal worth and individual power and agency. Being sensitive to my own tendencies towards exploitation, objectification and unilateral control, I attempt to share power and control of the interaction so that within it the client can find her own power and dignity. I recognize that I cannot fulfil the clients needs or solve her problems for her and that her healing depends on her courage in finding her own center and engaging in relationship. I understand my client as a moral agent,

living and acting in a complex relational web that shapes her experience and potential in creative and destructive ways and which also gives her power to act and shape her environment creatively or in ways which are destructive to herself or others. I affirm the client's capacity for love and for wholeness, and her power to act in creative and life-giving ways, and I affirm our mutual responsibility for our communal life.

As counselor I respect the client, affirming the sacred mystery of the person I am with, and the mystery and the potential of our relationship--our coming-together here-now. I affirm the client's inherent value and our equality as we stand in the presence of God. I affirm the presence of God working within her life, within mine and between us, loving, accepting, healing and challenging. I listen deeply from my own center trying to "hear where words come from,"¹⁹ and addressing the client at her center of awareness, subjectivity and agency. Respecting the client's concerns and agenda, I also expect to receive respect. I am committed to being open to myself, remaining in touch with my own feelings, thoughts and desires and my own center. I am willing to be open to my client to be seen, unmasked in

¹⁹ This phrase comes from Quaker tradition and is attributed to a native American chief with whom John Woolman, an eighteenth century Quaker, was worshipping. Unable to understand each other's literal words they could nevertheless feel the deeply spiritual place from which they came.

my humanness and imperfection; to speak honestly from my center; to be touched and moved by our encounter.

Listening deeply and speaking honestly is an encounter with truth--an open, honest and often painful facing of the existential reality of the client's life and of what is happening between us. Our partnership is not free of conflict nor do we always agree. I am committed to listening, hearing and speaking until empathy is restored, and to exploring difference, so that we learn from our disconnections how to meet each other more deeply and work together in mutually empowering ways. As we mutually negotiate our boundaries and learn how to move through them to connect with one another we can sometimes meet from heart to heart, sharing tears and joy, and knowing sacred presence.

Exploring Self in Relationship

Traditional forms of therapy still beholden to a medical model proceed through a process of diagnosis and evaluation to a plan for treatment. Removed from its medical implications, diagnosis can be understood as the lens that a therapist brings to the counseling encounter. As discussed above, a feminist therapeutic for pastoral counseling brings an interrelational lens to its understanding of selves and their relationships, one which looks for the relational power dynamics working within the client's relational context, and which looks for the

client's degree of internal cohesion and relational connectedness. What kind of pastoral diagnosis would this approach and our model of centering selves suggest? The following is a list of questions for exploration which I suggest a feminist pastoral counselor working from a theology of erotic power might bring to the counseling encounter and which may form the basis for a feminist pastoral diagnosis. Note that this exploration is always a joint task, an exploration in which both client and therapist share. The accuracy of the final diagnosis rests solely in the extent to which it brings clarity and authenticity to the client's experience of herself and her world and deepens the empathic connectedness of counselor and client.

Questions for Individuals

- What are the contours of this person's woundedness?
 - Where have they been hurt, rejected and violated?
 - What masks and defenses helped them to survive?
 - What methods are used to decrease pain?
 - What parts of the self are denied, disowned, disappeared?
 - Where has this person received empathy, respect, and nurture?
 - Where have they been delighted in?
 - What currently provides a sense of aliveness and connection in their lives?
 - Where do they experience themselves as powerful? as creative?
 - Where/how is the Spirit moving in this client's life?
- What inner demons are imprisoning this person?
 - What are the voices of self-hate saying?
- What are this person's current relational capacities and resources?
 - (1) in relation to self
 - (a) awareness--extent of cognitive understanding, emotional awareness, imaginative capacity,

intuitive awareness, awareness of bodily sensations and physical surroundings, feeling of aliveness

(b) agency--capacity for emotional expression, engaged activity, initiative, cooperative participation, moral responsibility

(c) Level of integration/centeredness

(2) in relation to others

extent of nurture and support in current relationships

extent of abusiveness in current relationships

extent of social oppression

openness to intimacy

ability to feel and receive empathy

extent of need to control interaction

sense of aliveness in current relationships

ability to be alone

connectedness to community

(3) in relation to God

sense of aliveness and zest for life

experience of presence/holding

sense of anger/betrayal

relationship to a wider context of meaning and purpose

relationship to a faith community

image of God and God-self relationship

understanding of suffering

understanding of limits and death

awareness of capacity for loving action

awareness of capacity for abusiveness

understanding of responsibility

How do I feel in relation to this client?

Do I feel controlled, exploited or victimized?

Do I feel superior, indifferent, controlling?

Am I meeting this client as an equal?

What are our differences?

Do I like this client and look forward to our encounter?

Am I interested in getting to know her?

Am I scared, disengaged, closed off?

What moves me about this client? What makes me angry?

What do I enjoy about this client?

Do I feel drained or energized by our encounter?

What is this client teaching me?

When working with couples rather than individuals, the interrelational lens needs to be focussed on the relationship between the two persons as well as their

individual selves and broader relational context. The following is a list of questions a counselor working from the perspective proposed here might bring to therapeutic engagement with a couple. This can also be extended to work with families where consideration is given to the whole system of relationships, and particular attention needs to be paid to ways in which children's subjectivity and agency may be being violated.

Questions for Couples

- What are the sources of inequality in this relationship?
--socially, financially, historically, educationally, responsibilities, family background.
- In what ways does the relationship provide caring, respect, safety, nurturing and connectedness for each person?
- In what ways are individuals silenced, controlled or violated?
- Where do disconnections occur?
- Where is there dependency, guilt and manipulation?
- Where is there mutuality, a sense of "we-ness" and sharing?
- Does each acknowledge, respect and engage the other as a unique subject?
- Is power shared in the relationship?
- Do they share activities and friendships?
- How much cognitive and affective empathy is shown for one another?
- Is there awareness of the feelings and needs of self and other?
- How much tolerance is there for the direct expression of thoughts and feelings?
- Is the mode of communication blaming, bargaining, debate or lecture?
- Are time and initiative shared in their interaction?
- Is there a sense of shared cooperation and synergistic engagement?
- How does the relationship work to empower each individual and can this be done without the sacrifice of the other?
- Is there space for each individual to be alone, to initiate their own creative activities and maintain their own friendships?
- How are differences negotiated?
- Is responsibility taken for hurtful and caring actions?
- Is there recognition of mutual brokenness?

Is there possibility for grace, forgiveness and reconciliation?
 How does the couple reconnect following relational disconnection?
 Where are the boundaries between and within selves?
 Where are they rigid, dissolved, and permeable?
 What threatens the relationship for each individual?
 What goes unspoken in the relationship?
 Can both people say--"I love you," "Thank you," "I'm sorry,"
 "I need you" and "Go away."

Centering the Self

Within the therapeutic approach being developed here, the "treatment" process seeks to empower a strong self in relation. As such it has two movements. The first moves toward the intrapsychic integration of mind, body and feelings, and of split-off, or repressed, parts of the self.²⁰ This involves becoming aware of the the totality of one's experience and discovering a center in the midst of that experience. The discovery of a center of awareness is also the discovery of a center from which to decide, speak and act--a center of agency. The second movement is towards reconnection in relationship, towards increasing capacity for mutual relationship and deepened connectedness with all aspects of the relational world. Both movements happen together. Pastoral counseling thus embodies both a call to self and a call to solidarity and compassion.

Awareness. As we saw in Chapter 4, awareness is the

²⁰ As self psychology suggests fragmentation within the self can be "horizontal"--repression--or "vertical" where different parts of the self are available to consciousness but split off from each other.

first requirement for the process of healing.²¹ Once a therapeutic context of empathy and mutual trust has developed, a safe relational space is created wherein feelings can be explored and expressed. At first the feelings of which the client is aware will be surface feelings, often versions of the "plastic" and "potted" passions Mary Daly describes--depression, anxiety, resentment, and other emotions which debilitate and disempower the client's agency and sense of aliveness. Mirroring and validation of the client's experience, and listening for the connections to the relational situations of her life both past and present, can help move the interaction toward the expression of deeper, more direct feelings which can be clearly located within relational contexts--for example, moving from depression to anger or grief.²²

Within the therapeutic relationship, empathic responsiveness allows the client to explore her internal experience, practicing naming and expressing thoughts, feelings and desires. The therapeutic relationship creates a relational space in which the client can come to know herself as a centered self with an inner space of

²¹ See above, p. 187.

²² I have heard this movement described as one from relatively stable moods (depression, anxiety, cheeriness, frustration, discontent) to dynamic emotions (anger, fear, joy, grief) which provide energy for change.

consciousness connected to a relational network in which she has her being. In the therapeutic relationship the client comes to experience an inner space as she learns to share her awareness with an empathic other where feelings are mirrored and are experienced at deeper levels through the depth of connection in the relationship.²³ Therapy proceeds as the client becomes able to experience what she finds arising within her inner space without fear; begins to find some order in the inner chaos; gets to know and name sub-personalities; begins to lift the veils and dismantle the walls which have previously hidden parts of her self.

A variety of methods and techniques can be used as appropriate. Often correct naming within an empathic context is enough to allow emotions to come to awareness and be expressed. When feelings are numbed, breathing and body awareness can help individuals move through and touch feelings. The experience of a centered self can be enhanced through imagery, breathing and movement. Awareness of feelings can emerge as therapist and client seek to understand how such feelings, inner walls, and sub-personalities came into being, and how they are related to relational contexts both in the past and at present. Healing inner splits can be enhanced through building

²³ Unlike in psychosynthesis where the therapist acts as a "guide" in the exploration of an inner space assumed to be structurally present in the psyche, from this perspective a client's inner space emerges and is sustained by the relational encounter.

creative internal dialogue which defuses inner conflict. For example, through "inner child" work, the client's "adult" self learns to relate compassionately towards the "child" parts of her self and this leads to greater self-acceptance, freeing energy previously trapped in destructive inner conflict.

To get in touch with deep feeling, and to understand and accept its presence, is profoundly empowering and centering. When clients begin to recognize the difference between surface moods and emotions which connect with their centers, they begin to identify their experiential truth; this is accompanied by a sense of clarity and rightness which opens up possibilities for creative action.

This brings us the second movement of therapy which involves reconnecting with others in relationship and deepening one's level of connectedness, participation and intimacy. The therapeutic relationship is ideally one which offers an experience of empathy, mutuality and trust in relation. This is established as therapist and client get to know one another and experiment with ways to meet each other so that deeper truths can be experienced. The client brings her life story and experience to the therapeutic space and her own ways of relating. The therapeutic space ideally allows her to experience and express herself more and more as a centered self within the relationship. The process of mutually negotiating boundaries with the

therapist can allow the client to experience her boundaries as permeable and fluid in interaction. For some clients this will mean learning to open rigid boundaries and risking exposure as trust develops in the relationship. For others it will involve learning to find a center and establish some boundaries so that they learn how to protect themselves from inappropriate vulnerability. The therapist's awareness and validation of appropriate withdrawal following any disconnections in the therapeutic relationship is essential to this process. The therapist then needs to work toward re-establishing connection through helping the client express her anger at the disconnection, acknowledging and receiving the client's anger in respectful ways, and being willing to make appropriate changes.

Empowerment. Awareness is a major part of coming to know the self as center. However, the self is more than a center of awareness; it is also a center of agency. As feelings, needs and desires are identified, movement can be made toward assessment, decision and action. Thus therapy also seeks to empower the client's sense of her own agency. A sense of agency depends on the existence of space in relationship where one's actions will be acknowledged, honored and allowed to affect the relational situation. Such space is given in the therapeutic relationship where the client's ability to act toward creative change is affirmed, and where exploration of the therapeutic

interaction, as well as other relationships, can take place and options for change can be explored.

Many women feel very powerless in their lives and intimate relationships. It is important to clarify the nurturing and destructive aspects of the relationships which make up the client's life, including her relationship to herself and the wider world, and to identify where changes need to be made. Since a woman's sense of powerlessness can reflect socio-economic realities, it is important to make a realistic assessment of where, how and with whom clients do, and do not, have power to make changes in their lives. It is also important to consider the communal resources which may help empower change in their lives.

To act powerfully within relationships, particularly if these relationships are not mutually respectful, can take enormous courage. Therefore, empowering the self's agency involves working with the conflicts that block creative action. These are often a result of guilt, shame or fear which inhibit the self from acting with integrity and purpose. Guilt, shame and fear can be signs of fragmented selves or relationships, and require work toward releasing inappropriate self-judgment and blame, and toward facilitating relational reconciliation. For women who are coming to an understanding of the ways in which they have been demeaned or violated in relationship, anger can be particularly empowering in the movement toward agency and

can help them to move through guilt and fear. Used creatively, anger can empower women to protect themselves from abuse, take responsibility for their actions, move out of isolation, find communities which offer support and mutuality, and risk opening in new ways.

Developing an empowered sense of agency also requires that the client come to a clear sense of responsibility, so that she can evaluate where she is being, and has been, treated unjustly and also identify the ways in which she is using, or has used, her own agency in ways which are destructive to herself and others. This facilitates both socio-political awareness and reflection where the client can come to understand the ways in which social structures have shaped her beliefs and actions in destructive ways, as well as ethical reflection on her own choices and actions within her relational world. Such exploration reinforces clients' sense of their own moral agency and capacity for making careful and compassionate decisions in their lives.

From co-dependence to compassion. The process of self-centering involves discovering the self not only as a center of awareness and agency but also as a center of passionate, engaged, loving and caring. Such caring is also a focus for therapy. It is through the experience of a centering self that the capacity to engage in loving mutual relation develops. As the client claims her own subjectivity, space, and power through the experience of mutual relationship, she

can more readily see others as subjects and enter into empathic and mutually respectful relation with them.

Mutual empathy and respect lead to compassion and the possibility of mutual reconciliation when disconnection occurs.²⁴ Nurturing and developing the capacity for tenderness, empathy and compassion are, then, important parts of the therapeutic task. While the ability to experience anger is essential for empowered agency and the re-establishing of right relationship, it is equally important to be able to experience tenderness, empathy, and compassion in relationship. The capacity for tenderness and the capacity for anger are both essential to the centering self--they are both ways of in which we are moved and touched in relationship and are a sign of our connectedness.

For women the movement toward engaged and loving relationship can often be characterized as a movement from co-dependence to compassion, a movement which accompanies the discovery of a centering self in mutual relation. Co-dependence is using another's pain to meet one's own needs under the guise of caring. These needs may be to raise one's self-esteem, to feel good, to feel superior, to gain approval, to avoid rejection/anger, or to avoid one's own feelings of shame, fear or powerlessness. Co-dependence is a way of manipulating people and situations which avoids

²⁴ For an excellent discussion of reconciliation from a feminist theological perspective see McNereney, 179-226.

real emotional contact and intimacy and takes us away from our own pain and responsibility. Co-dependence gives us power-over another and disempowers the other's agency. In contrast, compassion--feeling-with--is to stand with another in her pain and to meet or connect with her at that place. To do so touches our own pain and opens us up to our own humanness and vulnerability. Compassion generates feelings of equality with another where we know we share a common humanity. Its focus is on the relationship, on our standing together, subject with subject, faced with the same problems and joys of living. Compassion is mutually empowering and encourages the other's agency.

Any relationship may be characterized by both compassionate and co-dependent behaviors, the latter usually occurring when an individual is feeling fearful or insecure. Therapy can help individuals distinguish these types of behavior and move toward recognizing and understanding when they act co-dependently, at the same time as they learn to recognize and value mutually loving engagement. Moving beyond co-dependence does not mean giving up attending to and caring for others; it means learning to do that in honest, direct, engaged ways which honor oneself and the joy of mutual relation. In an abusive situation, however, co-dependent types of behavior may be the only way to avoid violence. In this case co-dependent behavior needs to be seen as a survival strategy which can be a positive and

life-giving way to use one's power within the current relational situation while exploring other avenues for change.²⁸ Some clients living within abusive intimate relationships may have a developed capacity for self-centering and intimacy in non-abusive situations, and this can be nurtured and affirmed in the therapeutic relationship. For others who have experienced severe and long-term relational violation, the therapeutic relationship may be their first experience of empathy and mutuality. Therapeutic work with couples can help to foster the experience of mutuality, empathy and intimacy between the couple within the counseling session and can suggest methods for the couple to nurture their capacities for mutuality outside the therapeutic setting.

A spiritual center. The experience of centered selfhood can also be deepened through the experience of a spiritual center within oneself, where the flowing of erotic power in relation is experienced, and from which purpose,

²⁸ This is particularly true for oppressed groups where individuals are powerless to change an oppressive system as a whole but find indirect ways to resist the system and gain a sense of personal worth and communal strength through sabotage, humor, and/or other methods. When oppressed individuals can experience themselves as part of a group where they are valued and seen as subjects and agents, the devastating effects to self-esteem of living within an abusive system can be diminished. Such was often the case in slave communities. Women have also found ways to gather together to share their experiences and give each other mutual support and affirmation. In many abusive relationships, however, women are severely isolated from external relationships which might empower them to risk change.

meaning, and vocation can emerge. Working with the client's faith resources and spiritual experience are particular areas where pastoral counselors can enhance the knowledge and experience of centered selfhood and mutual relation.

It is important to look at how the client's faith and spiritual experience are working both to foster and to detract from the experience of centered selfhood and mutual relation. As discussed in earlier chapters, much traditional theology externalizes and parentifies God, which can lead away from the experience of the sacred within oneself and in relation with others. However, even with such a traditional theology, the way in which clients experience it may be empowering.

For example, elsewhere I have shown that historically, Quaker women ministers were able to find empowerment even when their theology saw God and self as radically distinct because their spiritual experience was of God as a power and presence known within themselves. This allowed them to claim God's authority for their actions and thus to find a voice to speak the truth of their own experience, to confront family and social expectations, and to claim a vocation which gave meaning and purpose to their lives.²⁶ However, because most women ministers did not claim this power and authority on their own behalf but attributed it to God they continued to see themselves as inadequate, weak

²⁶ Graham, Women of Power and Presence, 33.

creatures despite the fact that they were leading active, empowered lives. They experienced an internal split between self and God and attributed their empowerment to God. The severity of this split determined their relation to external authority and the scope of their active work for social change.

An internal conflict between self and God can be a manifestation of social and parental injunctions which can be self-destructive and debilitating. This is particularly true if such a God is experienced as an external authority or punishing parent rather than as a loving presence which can be known and felt in our lives. Much traditional spirituality advocates emptying oneself of self and giving up one's own will and power. Yet the experience of God's presence can be very different from this--for example, we may find that in prayer we do not give up self but rather we find out what we want; we discover what our center is telling us. We find God and self together. Learning an inward stillness can lead us to a depth of self-awareness through and beneath our feelings which leads to a profound self-acceptance as well as a profound awareness of our aliveness and our relational connectedness to all of life. This can lead to the discovery of an inner power and loving presence at the center of our lives which can help to heal our inner conflicts as well as help us to face outer conflicts with the power and presence of centered selves.

Any spiritual practice or religious experience which helps to nurture a client's sense of relatedness to all of life, which helps to bring meaning to the presence of suffering and limitation in life, helps to foster a sense of responsibility and vocation, engages with the mystery of life's purpose, and connects clients with the common humanness that we all share, will contribute to the experience of a centered, centering self, the joy of mutual relation, and the movement of the sacred within and between selves.

A Centering Self Workshop

The following is a design for a one-day workshop for women which shows how some of the ideas presented in this project might be applied to such a setting. The purpose of the workshop is to allow participants to experience themselves as centers of awareness and agency within the context of their relational connectedness. The short space of time offered by a workshop format limits what can be achieved; however, group retreat and workshop experiences can provide powerfully transformative experiences in ways not possible within individual therapy. They provide an opportunity to experience the struggles, pain and joy of others' stories, and to have one's own received with empathy and support, in ways that can be very empowering, and they offer an experience of being-with others in a non-abusive context. The experience of mutual relation which can emerge

in such a group allows individuals to explore new ways of being-with others and can give them a vision of the possibilities of human connectedness which strengthens resistance to abusive forms of relating.

Setting

The workshop takes place in a large, comfortable, light room with space to move and a circle of chairs. Ideally it also has access to an outdoor space or garden. The workshop is designed for 10-12 women, perhaps from a church community, perhaps from the community served by a pastoral counseling center or elsewhere. (If there are more than 12 participants the group will have to be split into two for group sharing and would probably need two leaders.) Participants are asked to bring a pillow, a blanket, and both something for themselves to eat and something to share for lunch.

The workshop is publicized with an announcement such as the following:

Centering Our Selves: A Workshop for Women

As women today, we are often pulled in many different directions and rarely take time to be with ourselves and listen to what we know and feel inside. This one-day workshop offers women the chance to take a day away from their everyday lives to focus on getting to know and love themselves a little better. Through experiential exercises we will take time to nourish our selves, to find a center amidst the busyness of our lives, to honor who we are as individuals, and to honor our capacities for caring. We will leave with new energy to face the challenges of our lives.

Format

The workshop has four separate sections which are planned to take about two hours each (but can easily be extended for a longer weekend workshop or retreat). The overall format is as follows:

Introductions
 Session I: Finding Our Centers
 Break
 Session II: Our Many Selves
 Lunch
 Session III: Selves Together
 Break
 Session IV: Honoring Our Selves and Each Other
 Closing

Introductions

Leader's introduction. Leader welcomes the group and gives a short introductory talk introducing the theme of centering selves in relation.

Talks about how little time we give ourselves to be with our selves and to experience what we're really feeling and wanting. Describes this workshop as a time to stop, to breathe, and to go deeper. Introduces the idea of center. Names women's tendency to live for others, and from the outside-in, even though we realize that this often doesn't work very well and leaves us feeling depleted and resentful. Suggests many of us realize we need to care for ourselves and honor what we know and feel inside--at our center; yet at the same time we value our capacities to care and to be sensitive to others' feelings and needs; so our task is to learn how to live with, not for, others in ways which are caring and respectful both to ourselves and to others in our lives. Encourages participants to relax into the day and let themselves trust whatever happens for them, being open to and honoring the feelings, thoughts and images that come up. Invites them to take responsibility for taking care of themselves, giving them permission not to take part in any exercise with which they feel uncomfortable and stating that they are free to use the structure

provided by the workshop in ways which feel right to them.

Naming our selves. Participants talk to a partner and identify two similarities and two differences between them. Then going around the circle, each woman introduces herself by giving her name and speaking of one way she is similar to and different from the women next to her. Leader gives overview of day and explains logistics--e.g., lunch arrangements, restrooms, etc. Leader shares an image of center that is meaningful to her, and other women are invited to do the same.

Session I: Finding Our Center

Session starts with individuals gathered in a circle standing up. Leader leads participants in breathing and stretching, focussing their attention on their body sensations. Then leader invites participants to start to rock gently from side to side, trying to feel and locate their bodies' center of gravity. Then participants are invited to walk around the room and sense the difference between moving in an uncentered way--e.g., with the head leading the body--and moving from the center of the body.

Centering meditation. Participants find a comfortable place to sit on the floor or in a chair. Leader leads them in the following meditation:

Begin by finding a comfortable position to sit where your back can be straight. Feel your center of gravity as you sit. I will be leading you through a guided meditation, and I invite you to relax, close your eyes, and just listen to my

words. For each of us some parts of this meditation will feel easier than others--if anything feels uncomfortable to you ignore it and wait until the next part. Don't worry about trying to do this right, anything that happens for you is fine.

We will begin with some simple breathing so let's start by taking a couple of deep breaths. Now just let your breathing come in its natural rhythm. To pay attention to our breathing is a simple way to bring ourselves right into the moment, to become aware that we are alive, living creatures, present here and now. The pattern and rhythm of your breathing is unique to you. As you become aware of the pattern of your breathing you might like to take a moment to be thankful for being alive today, and a moment to thank yourself for giving yourself the gift of this day of renewal. . . .

Keeping attention on your breathing, notice the sounds around you in the room and notice the sounds of others breathing. We all share the air that we breathe, it passes in and out of each one of us, it nourishes and connects us all. Become aware of yourself breathing, one unique individual among a group of other unique individuals. . . .

Now focussing your attention inward, notice what is going on in your own inner space--perhaps thoughts are flitting across your mind; if they are, just notice each one and let it drift away knowing you can come back to it later. What sensations are going on in your body? Notice each one of those and then let it gently pass out of your awareness. You might also be aware of feelings--again notice each feeling and let it float away knowing you can come back to it later. Let your breathing take you deeper and deeper within yourself, deeper . . . and deeper . . . and deeper . . . until you find a safe place within you where you can rest. . . . This place of rest is your center--what is it like for you? . . . As you rest there at your center, let yourself imagine yourself surrounded by a warm and comforting light, let it flow through you, feel it soothing your body and restoring the tired places. . . . If you feel your attention wandering just bring it back gently to your center and rest there.

Now let yourself open yourself from the center outward as if a light were radiating out from your center bathing the world around you with a warm light, holding the others in the room in that warm

light. Just stay resting in your center radiating out the energy that flows around and within you.

In a moment I am going to ask you to make a sound--it will be an "o" sound on one note like this--"oooooooooooo". When you feel ready, let that "o" sound emerge from your center. Imagine that "o" sound radiating out into the world, from your very center of being. . . .

Now let any other sounds or notes you want to emerge from your center. Imagine that this is your song to the world. . . .

Focus once again on your breathing and the quiet place within you. Be aware of how you are feeling. Thank yourself for being willing to take part in this exercise, and thank yourself for who you are, for the special song you sing in the world. You may also want to express to yourself any hopes and wishes you have for the day ahead or for your life at this time. . . .

Become aware of your breathing again. This exercise is coming to an end. When you are ready, begin to pay attention to the sounds in the room around you. When you are ready you may begin stretching and moving. . . . When you are ready you can open your eyes and we'll go on.

Group sharing time. Participants are encouraged to share what felt good, what was hard, and any insights or comments.

Expressive movement. Participants are asked to start walking around the room and experiment with walking (1) as if they are sacred, (2) as if they're depressed, (3) as if they're angry, (4) as if they're happy, and (5) as if they are strong and powerful. Stopping, participants find a partner to describe what their "strong and powerful" way of moving looks and feels like. Then participants gather in a loose grouping where they are asked to think of something in their lives which makes them angry. Leader shows participants how to punch into the air and leads the whole

group in punching and/or stamping their feet while letting out a loud "No!" Participants are given a chance to repeat this while thinking about anything else in their lives to which they want to say "No." Participants repeat this one more time, this time saying "Yes!" to something they wish to affirm in their lives.

Group sharing time. Participants gather in a circle again and are given a quiet time to sit and reflect, and perhaps make a few notes about their experience. Then there is time for some group sharing of reactions to the session.

Session II: Our Many Selves

Writing exercise A. Participants are given paper and pens. Exercise start with some breathing and centering time. Then participants are asked to think about and describe in writing "my false self" and "my true self." They are then asked to write down any differing parts of themselves that they can identify--examples are given of the Critic, the Frightened Child, the Joker, Ms. Manners. Participants, including the leader, share what they have written with the group, and are given permission not to share if it feels too uncomfortable.

Writing exercise B. After a short time to stretch, participants find a comfortable place in the room to write on their own. They are asked to identify a particular issue or interpersonal situation that is troubling them in their current lives. They are then asked to describe the issue

or situation in writing as clearly and as briefly as they can, identifying any feelings and desires that they have in relation to it. Then they are asked to reflect which of the parts of themselves that they wrote about earlier might be involved in this particular situation and in what ways, and what parts might be in conflict in this situation. Finally they are asked to write: "If I were able to be strong, powerful, clear and compassionate in this situation I would" Total time for writing limited to 30 minutes.

Group sharing and affirmation. Participants, including the leader, share what they have written. To close the session each person in the circle is given the chance to say out loud, "I, (name), am a strong and compassionate woman," and the group replies "(Name), you are a strong and compassionate woman." Leader ends by saying, "Yes, we are strong and compassionate women. Blessed be."

Session III: Being Selves Together

Outside meditation. Following an hour's break for lunch participants gather again and are given the assignment of spending some quiet time outside. They can walk all the time or find a comfortable place to sit outside. It is suggested that they relax and breathe and enjoy their surroundings. Their task is to be aware of all the things that they observe and to let themselves feel their relatedness to them. They are asked to try to open themselves to connecting with the being of a particular

tree, stone or plant they encounter. On their way back to the gathering room they are asked to bring something to share with the group that expresses something of who they are or what they experienced. It is suggested that they ask permission of the object before taking it.

Group reflection. Participants gather in a circle and show the object they brought back, explaining briefly what it means to them. Leader then asks the participants to look around the group at the different people and be aware of what they are feeling. Leader asks them to reflect on how they felt when they first joined the group and if anything has changed. Leader describes her own experience of joining groups--perhaps her sense of aloneness, her thoughts that nobody will like me, I'm different, I'm not sure they're my kind of people anyway. Then leader asks participants to be silently aware of: to whom in the group they feel close and from whom they feel distant: to whom they feel similar and from whom they feel different; to whom they feel superior or inferior; and who feels uncomfortable or scary. Reflection ends with a short breathing and centering time where participants are asked to say to themselves, "I honor myself, I honor each person here." Individuals are given a chance to go to another person in the group, stand before them, state what they see as a difference between them and then say, "I honor our difference." Leader teaches a group chant: "The spirit in me honors the spirit in thee. May we

blessed be, together in harmony."²⁷

Coming out of hiding. Participants place their objects on a table at one end of the room, chairs are moved away to create space. Each participant finds a partner and they take turns to do the following exercise. One partner crouches down on the floor and imagines being very isolated, afraid or angry, and unwilling to relate to anybody else. The other partner, without words, tries to invite her into relationship until the other begins to respond and come out of hiding.

Mirroring exercise. With same partners, participants do a mirroring exercise where they stand opposite one another and one chooses to lead first. She holds her hand up palms outward, the partner places her hands opposite almost touching hers. The one who has chosen to lead moves her hands slowly while the other mirrors her movement. Then the other leads. Finally they try taking turns leading and following with no pre-arranged leader. Participants are asked to be aware of whether its easier for them to lead or follow or to share leadership and what feelings come up in each case.

Exploring difference. Participants walk around the room. They start by not looking at others and are asked to be aware of how they move in the group--do they take up a

²⁷ This is an adaptation of a chant taught at a Winter Solstice celebration in Deerfield, Massachusetts, 1990.

lot of space, do they keep to the corners, etc. Leader explains what will be happening next and asks anyone who feels uncomfortable with the exercise to walk to the edge of the group and observe. Participants are encouraged to be aware of the feelings that come up for them in the exercise. Participants keep moving around the room until the leader says "Stop," each participant finds a partner and they spend 30 seconds looking each other in the eye. Then everyone starts walking around again, this time making eye contact with people as they pass. Leader says "Stop" again and participants find another partner; this time they hold hands and look into one another's eyes for 30 seconds. Again they move and a third time the leader says "Stop"; this time the partners sit down and take turns to spend 30 seconds gently touching the other's face and looking in their eyes. Participants join hands in a circle and breathe and center themselves. They are asked to be aware of their connection to others in the group.

Anger mime. Two people volunteer to go into the center of the circle. They stand facing one another. One is asked to imagine that she is very angry with the other for some reason, she mimes the anger with body movements for a few seconds and then stops, the second person then responds with her own body movements, in whatever way feels appropriate; she may express her own anger back or she may try reconciliation. The movement dialogue goes to and fro for a

few minutes until it reaches a resolution. Another couple are invited to try the exercise. Some time is given for sharing reflections.

Loving touch. Breathing and centering, participants take a few minutes to massage their feet, arms or hands. Leader asks them to imagine opening themselves up and channelling healing energy to these part of their bodies, and thanking and honoring what their bodies give to them. Then, in partners, participants are given a brief introduction to therapeutic touch. In this method one partner lies relaxed in a comfortable position on her back. The partner spends the first couple of minutes sitting holding her shoulders while she breathes and centers herself. This partner silently offers her time and energy for the healing of the other and begins to move her hands over the other's body a little above the surface, perhaps coming to rest on different parts of the body from time to time. The one who is doing the touching is encouraged to follow her intuition as to where and how to move her hands, with the focus being on opening herself and channeling good energy through her hands to the other. The one who is lying down relaxes and imagines opening herself to the healing energy around her. When both partners have had a chance to do this, they share their experience. Participants are encouraged to notice what thoughts and feelings arise for them, whether giving or receiving was easier for them, and

why that might have been.

Session IV: Honoring Our Selves and Each Other

Group sharing. Gathered in a circle, the group has five minutes of quiet time for individuals to make any notes about their experience and about what they have learned about themselves in relationship. Participants are invited to share anything they choose about their experience in the last session's activities.

Anointing. A bowl of scented oil is placed in the center of the room. Each participant, in turn, goes to the center of the circle and anoints herself with oil on her forehead and says what she wants to honor in herself e.g., "I honor my self, I honor my courage, my caring, my playfulness, my thoughtfulness, my anger, my . . . etc." The woman then remains in the center while others in the circle take turns to say what they honor about her--e.g., "I honor your willingness to be open," "I honor your difference from me," "I honor the gentle way you looked at me earlier," "I honor your caring hands," "I honor the way you made me laugh at lunch time," "I honor . . . etc." Leader pays attention to time making sure group moves on to another person after a couple of minutes.

Closing meditation. Leader leads the group in a closing meditation as follows:

Take a couple of moments to stretch and then get yourself into a comfortable position. Take a couple of deep breaths and let your attention focus inward. Let yourself be aware of what you

are feeling right now and what thoughts are crossing your mind. Be aware of what memories you will take away with you from this day.

Let yourself sink deeper now . . . deeper . . . and deeper . . . to that quiet place within you . . . and let yourself rest there for a few moments. Be aware of the circle of women around you and yourself as one of the circle, present with the others, receiving their energy and radiating energy from your center. . . .

Now imagine that there is a wise woman sitting in the center of the circle and looking at you-- she has sparkly eyes, full of love and compassion. . . . Let yourself rest in her gaze and see if she has any message for you at this time . . . Now the wise woman fades away, but you sense that she has not gone but is now inside you, deep down at your center. Feel that wise woman deep down inside you and know that she is there to bring you guidance and renew your strength in the middle of life's struggles. Honor and thank the wise woman within you. . . .

Become aware of your breathing once again. It is now almost time to end our workshop, so when you are ready, let yourself become aware of the room around you once again, and when you are ready you can begin to stretch, and when you are ready, open your eyes.

Group blessing. Leader teaches the group a closing blessing: "May the long-time sun shine upon you, all love surround you, and the pure light within you, lead you all the way home."²⁸ Groups stands, holds hands, sings the blessing two or three times, and ends with a group hug. Time is left for people to stay and talk informally, say goodbye to one another, etc.

²⁸ This blessing comes from the community of Pendle Hill, Wallingford, Pennsylvania.

Concluding Reflection

It is my hope and my faith that pastoral counseling can address the personal and social violence which profoundly fragments our relational world. Centering our selves, by becoming aware of our thinking-feeling experience, by sharing our broken hearts, finding our compassion, and learning to touch and be touched in loving rather than violent ways, offers us a pathway toward healing. Centering our selves in mutual relation offers us a pathway toward the recovery, in our personal and communal lives, of the erotic --that vivid sense of aliveness, empowerment and connection that fills our hearts with joy and our eyes with tears. Centering ourselves offers us a pathway toward the knowledge of the power and presence of the living God whose love flows within and among us.

Such centering is part of the work of liberation from, and resistance to, those forces which act against our communal well-being. It is part of the work of learning how to love one another as friends, and of finding ways in which we can live together at a deeper level of connectedness, caring and respect. Such centering embodies the hope that we can realize our potential for passionate living and for mutually enhancing relation, and so create communitites where we know ourselves as a common people and where we act together for our common well-being.

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